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November 27, 1893.

No. 787.

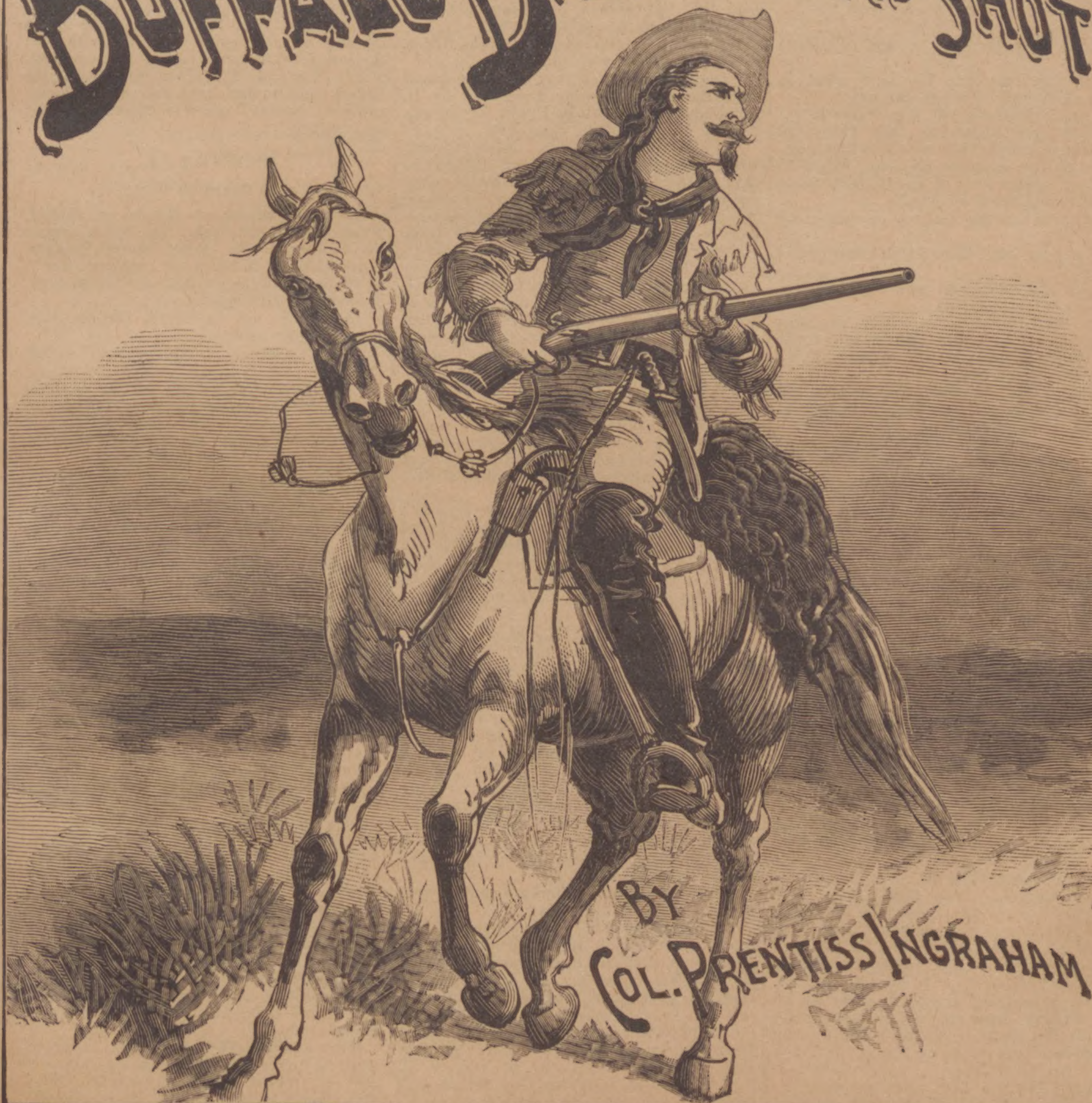
Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXI.

BUFFALO BILL'S DEAD SHOT



THE BUCKSKIN KING AND PRINCE OF PRAIRIEMEN.

Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot;

OR,

The Skeleton Scout of the Colorado.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF THE BUFFALO BILL ROMANCES,
"MONTEZUMA," "FREELANCE," "THE
SEA CADET," "BLUE BLOCKADER,"
"THE DUELIST," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRINCE OF PRAIRIEMEN.

"PARDON me, but who is that picturesque horseman who has just ridden up, my friend?"

"Picture? does yer call him a pictur', stranger—that man on the bay horse?"

"He is as handsome as a picture, and a very remarkable looking man."

"Now you is shoutin', for he be a remarkable man, one who flies don't light on, and who kin do more dead-shot shootin', hard-ridin', red-hot fightin', and is a all-round better feller than any one known in these parts, or otherwheres."

"His face reveals his perfect manhood, his physique is magnificent, and if he is not all you say of him, and more too, I would be disappointed in my diagnosis of his character."

"Stranger, yer flies a leetle too high for me ter catch ther meanin' o' yer words, for I talk only plain border American, but I guesses yer means well ter my pard."

"Then he is your friend?"

"From 'way back he be, and one to tie to."

"I'm goin' ter grip his hand when he comes along and I'll interdooce yer."

"I should be delighted; but who is he?"

"Don't yer know it's ther Prince o' Prairiemen, known from Texas to ther headwaters o' ther Missouri, an' from Frisco to Faraway, as ther king of 'em all that wears buckskin and handles a gun?"

"But you did not tell me his name, my friend."

"That's so; but I thought all know'd who he were."

"I am just seeking to gain that information now."

"It are Buffalo Bill, ther Buckskin King!" and the speaker uttered the words with the air of one who was making known a very important fact.

"Buffalo Bill!" repeated the stranger, and he started at the name as though he had indeed heard it before.

The two who were thus conversing were widely apart in their walks in life, for one was an Englishman of fine appearance, courtly manner and the air of a man of the world, while the other was a typical American plainsman, dressed in buckskin, wearing his hair and beard long, and with a bold, will-strong face that showed that he was one to confront dangers fearlessly as they came to him, and could make deadly use, if need be, of the belt of arms he carried.

They were standing in front of an adobe hotel in a small town on the Santa Fe trail, and had picked up an acquaintance through the Englishman looking for a guide to go into the interior of the wild and dangerous country lying toward the Rocky Mountains.

Into the stable-yard a few moments before had ridden a party of horsemen, one of whom had caught the eye of the Englishman by his picturesque bearing, handsome face and fine form.

He was dressed in buckskin hunting-shirt and leggings, top-boots, wide-brimmed sombrero, and was armed with a repeating rifle and belt of arms, while his horse and accoutrements were of the very best.

Having seen to the comfort of his horse, after dismounting and shaking hands with several men who knew him, Buffalo Bill came toward where the Englishman and his plainsman companion were standing.

"Ho, Haphazard Harry, I expected I'd find you here. How are you, old pard?" said Buffalo Bill, as he came forward, putting out his hand and grasping that of his fellow plainsman.

"Yas, Bill, I'm here now, but gone to-morrow, though I don't like ther contract, as it is too big for me; but I wants ter inter-

dooce yer to my friend— Now, Pard English, I has clean fergot yer name, never havin' heard it," and Haphazard Harry turned to the Englishman who answered with a smile:

"I'll introduce myself, my friend."

"Mr. Cody, I am Lord St. John Mildmay of the Queen's Lancers, England, and I bear a letter of introduction to you from Earl Enders—I have it with my traps."

"I am glad to meet you, Lord Mildmay, for your own sake as well as for your being a friend of Earl Enders, who was my comrade on many a long trail some years ago," and the two warmly shook hands.

"Yes, the earl told me of his having been with the United States Army in an Indian campaign, and what good friends you had become, while, as I came here on a most important mission, he urged me to seek your aid. I was hoping to find you somewhere on this frontier, and my accidental meeting with you is a fortunate one indeed."

"May I see you when you are at leisure?"

"Certainly, sir, as soon as I have attended to a little matter that has brought me here. Meanwhile Haphazard Harry will entertain you if any one can," and Buffalo Bill passed on into the adobe hotel, the eyes of every one upon him, for his name even then was known along the entire length of borderland.

CHAPTER II.

THE NOBLEMAN'S MISSION.

"So that is the renowned Buffalo Bill," said the Englishman, speaking rather to himself than to the old borderman.

Haphazard Harry nodded, and the Briton continued, in a way of soliloquy:

"I have read of that man for years, heard of his daring deeds when I was serving in India, and again when in Egypt, for he was the talk of the soldiers' camp fires."

"I had pictured him a different man, large, uncouth, fierce-faced, and of the type that marks the desperado the world over, and instead I find him a courtier, handsome in face, yes, with a womanly expression almost on his fine features, elegant in form and having the soul of true manhood stamped upon him indelibly."

"Pard, you is right thar, he is as clean-cut a man as America turns out, and that is saying a heap, for in this land o' freedom we jist puts up ther best men in the world," and Haphazard Harry seemed proud of his country and its people.

The Englishman smiled and answered:

"Well, my friend, I have, as I told Mr. Cody, a letter of introduction to him, and it was my wish to secure his services as my guide and escort on the expedition I have in view, and which I had some talk with you about."

"But I was told that Cody was away on a special mission, and so I came on here to find the right man. I am satisfied that you can serve me well, but if the great scout will take the full control I will be glad to have him do so, yet will wish your services also."

"I'm with yer, pard, and I'll go that much sooner and more pleased if Buffalo Bill commands the outfit, for you wants ter go into a country whar few men has been, and danger is as thick as parsons at a camp-meetin', so it takes narve and skill ter git thar and back, as Bill will tell yer; but you talk with him and what he says I'll do."

"Your confidence in the scout but increases my desire to have him go in charge of my expedition—ah! there he comes now."

The scout approached the Englishman, walking with upright, military bearing, and touching his sombrero with a salute he said in his pleasant way:

"Now, my Lord Mildmay, I am at your service."

The Englishman at once led the way to his room, asking Old Harry, as Haphazard Harry was often called, to accompany them, Buffalo Bill remarking, as Lord Mildmay stumbled over the old plainsman's name:

"You know, my lord, we use nicknames out here rather than real names, and Old Harry gained his sobriquet from the fact that he was wont to trust to luck in all things, and seldom did his good fortune fail him no matter what the venture he made."

"Yas, Pard English, call me Haphazard,

or Old Harry, just as yer pleases, only don't mister me."

Entering the Englishman's room, after he had bid them be seated and placed a flask and some cigars upon the table, he said:

"Let me tell you, Mr. Cody, I—"

"I beg pardon, my lord, but like Old Harry, I prefer the name I am best known by—that of Buffalo Bill."

"All right; it is the name you are making famous the world over. Well, Buffalo Bill, I am here on a very important mission, and I bear letters from my Government indorsing me."

"Your face will do that, sir."

"Thank you; but when I spoke to the Earl of Enders of my mission he promptly told me that you were the one man who could make my mission one of success, so gave me this letter to you," and Lord Mildmay handed the letter to the scout, who glanced over it and again bade him welcome to the borderland.

"I am a soldier, and have seen hard service in the saddle in India, Australia and Egypt, with considerable fighting as well, so I am not what you would call here a tenderfoot, though one perhaps in your life here on the border."

"I mention this to show you that I will not be in your way on our expedition, if you will undertake it for me."

"You appear like a man able to take care of himself, Lord Mildmay; but the mission, sir?" and Buffalo Bill gazed at the tall, athletic, splendid form of the nobleman with a look of admiration in his eyes.

"My mission, in a word, Buffalo Bill, involves a large fortune, and is, to find a missing heir, or proof of his death, his skeleton form in fact, to carry it back with me to England, for upon my success or failure hang human lives as well as honor and great wealth," and the nobleman spoke impressively.

CHAPTER III.

THE BRANDED HAND.

AFTER a moment of silence, as though reviewing the past events that had led up to his coming to the United States frontier, Lord Mildmay said in a low, earnest tone:

"What I say to you both I wish to communicate in confidence."

"Certainly, sir," assented Buffalo Bill; "we will so receive it."

"You bet we don't gossip, pard," added Old Harry.

"My reason for secrecy is that nothing may be done to thwart me in my mission, as there may be, for, as I said, a great fortune is involved, and human life as well, besides the honor of a proud name in England."

"When serving in India I had a companion who was a brother to me, and to whom I twice owed my life, which he saved at almost the certainty of meeting death himself."

"Once, when I was wounded, and my horse killed, he returned to my side, beat off the sepoys who were crowding upon me, aided me to his saddle, and catching hold of the tail of his horse, thus left the field."

"Again, when I fell backward before an enraged tiger, he threw himself before the infuriated brute, dropped on one knee and, with a revolver only, killed him, the animal falling so near that he gave him a severe blow with his paw; but I was saved from death."

"On another occasion when a brother officer, under the impression that I had wronged him, and in whose way I stood in the line of promotion, sought a quarrel with me, just as I was starting upon a long expedition, similar to scouting in your country, challenged me, my good friend, knowing his deadly aim and that he was proud of his career as a duelist, before my return, when I was to meet him, resented a remark he made against me, a meeting followed, and the man I was to face when I got back I found dead, run through the heart by my defender."

"I speak of these circumstances to show you that I have reason in what I now wish to do for him."

"But a shadow fell upon him in a love affair he had, where the maiden he hoped to wed was forced by her parents to discard him, though he was the idol she worshiped."

"Resigning his commission of captain in

the British Army in India, he left the country and came to the United States, severing all ties that bound him to England.

"After his coming here I had a letter from him dated at Santa Fe, New Mexico, and stating that he was going into the mining country of the American Sierras to make a fortune of his own.

"Since then no word has come from him to any of his old associates.

In the mean time his elder brother, Sir Duncan, who was, as the elder brother of the family, the heir to the title and estates, and loving the lady love of the brother in India sought to wed her, was killed by being thrown from his horse, so that leaves my friend the inheritor of the title and fortune when his father passes away.

"But, meanwhile, a man turns up in London, a sailor, accused of murder on the high seas, and in appearance he is the exact image of my friend, Trevor De Villers.

"His size is the same, his bearing, and he has the same handsome face and voice, only dissipation and a rough life have left their traces upon him.

"He is in prison, under sentence of death, gives the name of Tremain Villers, both family names of my friend, yet claims that he is not Captain De Villers, or related to him.

"This it is thought he does to save the disgrace it would bring to the family, while there appears to be a most striking proof that he is my friend, who, when a wee infant was *branded in the hand by his father*.

"I say branded, but really it was the coat-of-arms of the family pricked into the palm in India ink.

"At the time of his birth the Gypsies were kidnapping many children, and Lord De Villers was determined, should his child be stolen, he would have an undoubted mark of identification.

"Now, this prisoner, under sentence of death for murder, *has this same brand in the palm of his left hand*.

"All are convinced that he is Captain Trevor De Villers, but I doubt it as he says that he is not the captain, and my noble friend could not be what that man is in guilt.

"I secured a stay of execution for a stated time, and came here to try and find my friend, confident that I can do so, if he is yet alive.

"Now you understand my mission, Buffalo Bill, and as Lady May Melville is still unmarried, and my friend is the heir to the title and estates of the De Villers, her family would be only too glad to allow the union, and I only hope to find my lost friend through your aid."

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL'S DECISION.

BUFFALO BILL had listened with the deepest attention to the story of Lord St. John Mildmay, the gallant major of the British Lancer Guards.

He was struck with admiration for the Englishman's devotion to his friend, and yet he could not understand, with the proof of the branded hand against the condemned murderer in England, how he could fail to realize that he was really the missing captain, Sir Trevor De Villers.

"This man you say resembles the missing officer, my lord?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"He is the counterpart of him, save for a certain roughness which my friend does not possess."

"His height and bearing are the same?"

"Exactly."

"And his age?"

"About the same age he is that my friend would be if alive."

"And the brand in the hand is exact?"

"It is perfect."

"What does Lord De Villers say, sir?"

"He fears that the prisoner is his son."

"Has he a mother?"

"Yes, Lady De Villers is still alive."

"What is her opinion?"

"She asserts that the condemned man is her son."

"Is there no mark by which he was known to her?"

"Yes, a strange one, indeed, and the prisoner possesses that also."

"May I ask what it is?"

"Certainly. Lord De Villers possesses gray eyes that are very piercing, and Lady De Villers's eyes are deep blue and dreamy, and my friend had both his father's and mother's eyes, for one was a gray, and penetrating, the other a blue and gentle in expression, the profile of his face on either side presenting a striking difference in expression."

"This is a remarkable proof, I should say, sir; but the prisoner's are so marked, you say?"

"They are."

"Then I should consider this almost proof positive that he is your friend."

"Yet I do not, for I note differences that others do not detect, and I will stake my sword on it that the condemned man is not my friend De Villers."

"You appear very decided in your denial of the prisoner's identity with Sir Trevor De Villers, my lord," said Buffalo Bill.

"I am decided, so thoroughly so that I am taking all chances, paying all expenses, have gained a stay for the prisoner, and feel that I will yet prove that I am right."

"I hope so sincerely, sir."

"But, what does Lady Melville say, for I believe that you so-called the lady you referred to as being the one in whom your friend was so deeply interested."

"Yes, Lady May Melville of Moorlands."

"Yas, what does ther gal say, for they knows who they has fell in love with, and who they ain't," said Old Harry, speaking for the first time, yet deeply interested in all that he had heard.

Lord Mildmay smiled at the old plainsman's words and replied:

"Lady May says, as I do, that the condemned man is not Trevor De Villers."

"That is one to side with you, my lord, and a good one I should say; but the name of the prisoner you say is similar to that of your friend?"

"Yes, Buffalo Bill; he gives the name of Tremain Villers, both being family names of the De Villerses."

"What has he to say for himself, that is, of his past?"

"He will make no other statement than that he was born an Englishman, does not know who his parents are, went to sea when a little boy, has visited all foreign lands, has sailed over all seas and yet does not give the name of a vessel he has sailed on board of, save the one on which he led the mutiny in which he killed the first mate and a fellow seaman."

"Then nothing can be found out from him?"

"Nothing, Buffalo Bill, so you see I am going upon my own theory, aided by the confirmation of Lady May Melville that I am right."

"Well, my lord, I am now desirous to know just in what way I can help you?"

"As I said, my last letter was from Santa Fe."

"How long ago was that, sir?"

"Three years ago. Here is his letter, which you can read—when I was in India I received it, and five years after he left us."

"And he writes here that he was going to the mines?"

"Yes, he stated that he had lost what money he had in an investment in the ranching business, and was going to try and find a fortune in the mines."

"And you desire to hunt through the mines for him, sir?"

"Yes, in Arizona, Colorado, Utah and New Mexico, and I need your valuable services to aid me."

"I will go, my lord, but upon certain conditions," answered Buffalo Bill quietly.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCOUT'S PLAN.

"NAME your conditions, Buffalo Bill, and I will meet them whatever the cost," declared Lord Mildmay eagerly, when he heard Buffalo Bill state that he would go upon certain conditions.

The scout smiled and replied:

"The cost is not what I meant, my lord, for let me tell you that I am in the Government employ, Chief of Scouts of General Miles's command, and so can accept no out-

side pay; nor would I do so if I could, for any service I might render you."

"You are certainly very kind, sir."

"No; only just; but let me state that the conditions were to obtain the consent of my commanding officer, and if you could give me a couple of weeks' delay to complete a mission I am now on, after which I will return to the fort and then come to join you."

"I may say that I have letters from the Secretary of War to the frontier commanding officers, telling them to lend me every possible aid, for I stopped in Washington on my way here."

"I will ask you to present these letters to your commander for me."

"I will do so with pleasure, my lord."

"And what shall I do in the meanwhile?"

"Organize your expedition, sir, under Old Harry here, and go to a point I will designate on a map which I will give you, and where I will find you."

"I will obey your instructions to the letter, Buffalo Bill."

"You will need a camp outfit, pack-horses and stores for several months, my lord, say for a dozen men, for I will join you with six of my scouts, and besides Old Harry you had best take three men, a camp hustler, * a horsewrangler † and a cook, for I will furnish the fighting men when I come, except Harry here, who is worth half a dozen men any day in a tussle with Indians or outlaws, should you happen upon any, while he is as good a scout and guide as you could find."

"I am glad to hear so good a report of our friend here, Buffalo Bill, and am sure he is deserving of it, while I will rely upon him for just what we need for the expedition and the class of men to get; but, don't you think, as you said we would go into a dangerous country, I had better employ more men? for remember, expense is not taken into consideration on this expedition."

"You can engage others if you desire, my lord, but you must know that that camp hustler, wrangler and the cook are all frontiersmen and good fighters, so with Old Harry and yourself there will be five of you, and I feel very sure that you are a host in yourself, and by no means a tenderfoot."

"I fear I shall at first prove a novice, but I am anxious to learn; still it may be well to take two extra hands along."

"It may be, sir, a good idea, in case any of the outfit pass in their chips, or, you are attacked: but let me tell you again, sir, you can rely upon Old Harry for guidance and in a fight, for he is a thorough plainsman."

"I shall do so: but when do you think we should start?"

"To-morrow afternoon, sir, for it will be a long trail, and one you can make by easy stages to where I join you."

"About whar will thet be, Pard Bill?" asked Old Harry.

"You know the old Mormon fort, Maroni, Harry?"

The old scout started and looked fixedly at Buffalo Bill, while he replied, after some hesitation:

"Yas, I'm one o' ther few who lives ter say he knows old Fort Maroni," ‡ replied old Harry seriously.

"Yes, old pard, I am aware of the fact that there are few who know the spot, save the older Mormons, and our scouts and trappers, and that strange stories are told of that part of the country, and all that; but this letter of Captain De Villers states, I see, that he is going with a small party who have heard of rich gold mines in the Colorado River canyons, and their trail will be *via* the San Francisco mountains," said Buffalo Bill, glancing over the well-worn letter.

"I understand, Bill, and it's them trails they says is sart'in death for them as follows 'em."

"Are you afraid to go, old man?"

"Now look here, Bill, did yer ever know me ter git skeered?" reproachfully asked the old hills tramp.

"I confess I never did; but these stories have a smack of superstition in them and I

* One who looks after the camp.

† One who drives the pack and extra horses.

‡ The scenes of this story go back to a time when that part of the country was almost unknown.—THE AUTHOR.

know you have always stood in awe of spooks," and the scout smiled.

"Waal, spooks or sperits, devil or Injun, I'm with yer, even though I has ter tackle ther Skeleton Scout hisself."

"The Skeleton Scout?" asked Lord Mildmay with surprise and interest, and Buffalo Bill replied:

"I will tell you of the Skeleton Scout, my lord."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SKELETON SCOUT.

"YAS, Pard Bill, tell all yer knows about ther Skeleton Scout, and then I'll chip in with my leetle story," added Old Harry, with considerable enthusiasm.

"What I really know, Harry, is next to nothing, but I have heard a great deal about this apparition of the trails, the Skeleton Scout, and from men who profess to have seen him."

"You don't believe in him then, Bill?"

"I do not, old man, for I am not of the superstitious kind, and whenever I have run down a ghost or spirit scare-crow, I have proven it to be real flesh and blood."

"You both interest me greatly, in your reference to this Skeleton Scout, for on the trail here, a few nights ago in camp, I heard it referred to as a weird being that haunted certain trails," remarked Lord Mildmay.

"That is the story, my lord. Those who penetrate to the region of the San Francisco Mountains in Arizona, are reported to have seen a skeleton form, sometimes on a skeleton horse, at other times on foot; he is said to have warned them back from going in that direction."

"Indeed?"

"It is also stated that he has been seen flitting about the camps at night, and skeleton forms painted in red have been discovered upon the cliffs along the trail and even on the ground, always with the warning:

"Turn back! The Land of Death lies beyond!"

"This is remarkable, Buffalo Bill; but you say this has happened upon the trail we are to follow?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Have you ever seen any one who actually saw this apparition of the hills—this Skeleton Scout?"

"Yes, sir, several; but they were men whom I would not believe upon oath, and you know a lie started upon its travels will make lightning speed and grow from a pigmy to a giant before it has traveled far."

"Very true, and you doubt the existence of such a person, whether in masquerade or not?"

"I do, my lord."

"Yet it is possible that some one may be masquerading in skeleton form, for some purpose of his own."

"It is possible, my lord, but not probable, for that is a most dangerous country to dwell in, as the Indians are always hostile, and I can see no motive for such masquerading or trail-haunting."

"White men do not go there then?"

"The Mormons passed up through there some years ago, in large force, sir, so were strong enough to resist, and halted for a while on the march to Utah at old Fort Maroni, and that gave it the name."

"Then there was a train of emigrants, over three hundred strong, known as the Boston settlement, who settled near the San Francisco Mountains, but within a year the red-skins drove them away from the beautiful valley where they had located."

"Again there was a band of gold prospectors who went there and have never been heard of since, while several other smaller parties are missing, their fates being unknown."

"I was down at Fort Wingate a year ago and heard there rumors of the Skeleton Scout, and I am going there when I return from my present mission and will hasten on after you, for your trail lies by the fort, and it is the last succor you can look for from behind you. But, keep up a determination not to allow the weird stories to drive you off your trail, or to cause your men to get frightened and desert you."

"I will be most careful in this respect, Buffalo Bill; and more—I will encourage them by offering a very liberal reward for

the one who can discover this Skeleton Scout and give me a look at him."

"Yes, it would be a great thing, Lord Mildmay, if you could carry back with you to England a trophy of your hunt on our frontier in the shape of a skeleton form," asserted the scout, laughing.

"It would indeed be something to be proud of, and the man who gives me a sight of the Skeleton Scout shall receive the reward I offer."

"It kinder appears ter me, pard, that I war going ter git thet money you offers," old Harry quietly observed.

"I only hope that you will, my friend."

"You says, Pard Bill, as how them who have seen ther Skeleton Scout you wouldn't believe on oath?"

"True, old man."

"Does yer think I'm giventer lyin', Bill?"

"Never would suspect you of such a sin, old man."

"Then you would take my word for it, if I said what I had seen?"

"Most surely I would."

"Then let me tell you, Bill, and you too, Pard English, thet I has seen ther Skeleton Scout," was the emphatic rejoinder of the old plainsman.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE OLD PLAINSMAN SAW.

BUFFALO BILL was certainly surprised at the remark of Old Harry the plainsman.

He had never had reason to doubt the word of the man, and knew him to be reliable, brave and not given to "shooting the long bow" or talking too much.

He was a man who had lived his life among deadliest of dangers, had been a noted Indian-fighter, was a friend to tie to in trouble, and was trusted and respected by all who knew him.

Old Harry had one great fault, or sin, for he made the latter out of it.

That was he was a natural gambler.

He bet on a horse-race, on the weather, and all else that he found convenient to wager on, and yet only staked small sums then; but when he sold his pelts, or came out of the mines with a small sum of money, he would indulge in the fascinating game of poker until his last cent was gone.

He was never known to win, so played for the pleasure of losing.

His first deed was, when he had money, to deposit with a landlord of some hotel, a snug sum against his becoming penniless, and also to pay to a bartender an amount of money for treating his friends when he should go broke.

If he ran over these sums in his credit, he promptly settled when he got more money.

This made his credit gilt-edge with all who knew him, and he could get all that he wanted to eat, drink, wear or buy for his outing when he started upon the trail.

He was a "financial wreck" at the time Lord Mildmay came to the little town in New Mexico, and the landlord had at once said a good word for Old Haphazard Harry, and it ended in the Englishman securing his services.

That crime had driven Old Harry to the frontier no one believed, and he said it was because he had married a woman whom he had believed to be an angel, but had discovered was a devil.

"She were too much for me, pards, I tell ye, and when I found I were living in a climate too hot for me, and gittin' roasted for breakfast, dinner and supper, I jist lit out for ther far West, preferring ter fight Injuns ter facin' ther chin music of my wife."

"I had a enemy, who were my rival for her love and hand, and never forgive me for cuttin' him out, so when I went away I jist let folks think I hed died out here, and with my dying breath asked my enemy to fergive me and left him my widow with my blessing."

"Waal, he accepted the keepsake and I am avenged for all he did ag'in me."

Such was Old Harry's explanation of his going out West, and it was doubtless the true one.

Holding him in respect as he did, Buffalo Bill, when he heard him say that he had seen the Skeleton Scout, said:

"Well, old man, tell us your story of this weird haunter of the trails, for I will believe you."

"Yes, I shall be most glad to hear what you have to say, my friend," Lord Mildmay rejoined.

"Yer see, pards, it were a year ago, when I went on a trail all alone."

"A party started out gold-huntin' some three year ago, and it was their intention to go to the Colorado River Canyon country and try their luck, dangerous as they knew it to be."

"Among them was a dear friend o' mine, a youngish man who had twice helped me out o' trouble, once when I would have been kilt by a desperado I was gambling with, and again when I needed money, for his purse was open to me as my own."

"I met him on the trail here, when he was sick, and nursed him for a week or so, and he never forgot it, yer see."

"He was not a talkin' man, so I knowed nothin' about him more than that he was a gent clean through, handsome as a pictur', brave and generous, and a true pard."

"Well, he went with the party of gold-hunters, while I was away on a trail, and when I come back I found a letter he had left me."

"In it was fifty dollars in gold, and he said he would not need it, and he hoped to make a fortune, and if so would care for me in my old age."

"Well, they said as how the party was murdered, for they never tained up, any of ther seven who started, and so I decided to take ther trail and see ef I could find any trace of 'em."

"I went as far as ther San Francisco mountains and one night in camp I suddenly see out in the darkness a man's skeleton form."

"I hain't one ter shoot at a dead man, but I sent a bullet over his head, and the hands waved at me and the form disappeared."

"Ther next day I seen ther skeleton figger drawn in red in my trail, and again on a cliff."

"That night I seen ther form itself ag'in, and on a cliff in letters of fire I read!"

"Turn back! You go to the land o' death by this trail!"

"Did you turn back, Harry?"

"I did, Bill, you bet I did, and I made good time back to ther settlements; but I never spoke to any man until now about what I seen on that Colorado River trail," and the words of the old scout were most impressively uttered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECOGNITION.

THAT Old Harry told just what he had really seen both Lord Mildmay and Buffalo Bill were assured, though each had their own opinion as to the cause of the weird apparition and strange warning.

At last the scout asked:

"Have you never known the fate of your friend, Pard Harry, since he left on that trail?"

"Never."

"Have heard nothing from any of them?"

"Not a word."

"How many did you say there were in the party?"

"Seven."

"This was three years ago?"

"Yas."

"And it was three years ago that your friend started, my lord, according to his letter, and there were seven in his party," said Buffalo Bill.

"True, and the letter tells who were along, giving the names of the men as they were known to him—read what the letter says, Buffalo Bill."

The scout again turned to the letter and read:

"In our party are seven all told, and I have been elected captain of what they call out here the outfit."

"I have two congenial comrades in men who have come West to make a fortune, a guide by the name of Denny—"

"I know'd him, and I wouldn't trust him to watch a dead man ter keep ther cats off,

let alone to watch live men in danger," said Old Harry.

"I am sorry to hear this; but read on, Buffalo Bill."

Continuing, the scout read:

"We have a cook, and two others who go as camp hustler and horsewrangler, and, with myself, that makes up the outfit."

"The cook and the two last named I do not care much for, as they have hard faces; but then one cannot choose his company or attendants in this country."

"There is one old scout I would like to have gone with me, for he is a big hearted man, brave, skilled in all the work on the border, and we became fast friends, he having nursed me when I was ill, and afterward I was enabled to serve him in return; but the dear old fellow is away not to return for months, so I go without him."

There was more to the letter, not bearing upon the subject they had been discussing, so skipping it Buffalo Bill read again:

"This expedition will either make or mar my life."

"If I get a fortune in the mines I will return to England to enjoy it; but if I fail, then look upon me as dead to the world, the once happy past, our old life, bygone friendships and all, for I shall bury myself here in these wilds, a wreck, and willing to live and die unknown among those to whom a cruel fate has driven me."

"But through all, my dear Mildmay, I can never forget you."

"Ever your attached comrade,

"CHAMPAGNE."

The scout ceased reading, and Old Harry started as he ended the letter and asked quickly:

"What were ther name that was writ at ther end o' that letter, Bill?"

"Champagne" it is signed."

"The name we gave De Villers in India, on account of his bright, sparkling nature, his wit, jest and cheery way he had about him."

"He was known even among the men of our regiment as 'Captain Champagne,'" said Lord Mildmay.

"Captain Champagne!"

"Why, pard, that were the name of my young friend," said Old Harry.

"Your young friend?"

"Yes, sir, ther man I larnt ter love like a son, and who went on that gold-hunt with Denny, and whom I'd give much ter run ag'in' once more."

"I axed him his name one day and he said I was ter call him Champagne, while, as he always had a certain leader-like way about him, the boys called him captain, and it got to be Cap'n Champagne."

"The same that he bore in India—your friend and mine, old gentleman, are one and the same," cried the Englishman excitedly.

"Then ther Lord grant we find him, and bein' as sich is ther case, Pard English, and I don't see why it hain't, I jist calls our barg'in off we made atween us, and goes with yer without takin' one cent o' pay."

"No, my friend, I will not accept your generous offer, and unless you take pay you will have to remain behind, for your time is valuable I well know."

"Then I goes, but only make it a game for money if we finds him."

"Ah right, we will have it so if you wish; but Buffalo Bill, what is your opinion about this Captain Champagne being my friend De Villers?"

"I was certain that such was the case, my lord, before you said that the two were identical," replied the scout.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUSPICIOUS GUIDE.

"WELL, Harry, we have a double reason now for finding your Captain Champagne, for he is our mutual friend," said Lord Mildmay, after a few questions and answers among the three convinced all that there was not the slightest doubt but that the one who had been the old scout's comrade was none other than Captain Sir Trevor De Villers.

"I remember the report coming to the fort that the band of seven gold-hunters had mysteriously disappeared, no one ever hav-

ing had a word from any of them since their departure," said Buffalo Bill.

"That's so, Bill, no one hain't, and yet I somehow always expected I'd see my pard Captain Champagne ag'in."

"I hope we may see him, Harry, and believe it, too, for we must find him," Lord Mildmay said.

"There is one thing I don't exactly like, pards."

"Out with it, old man," Buffalo Bill said.

"Yer sees I didn't exzactly like ther comp'ny Champagne went along with, fer that feller Denny were as crooked as a grapevine and bad med'cine from 'wayback, and them as he engaged must have been of ther same kind."

"I hope not," anxiously said Lord Mildmay.

"You suspect treachery on the part of those who went with him, I take it, Harry?"

"Yas, Bill, that be my argiment."

"You have reasons for so believing that you have not yet made known to Lord Mildmay, I plainly see, so come, old man, there must be no underhand work between us now, so out with it."

"Bill, you reads men's faces same as a open book, for I merely *thought* what you sees in my looks."

"Then you have some secret knowledge regarding this mission our friend went on?"

"No, Pard Lord, I hain't no knowledge of the expedition, but I only thinks I has seen Denny the Gold Guide since they went out."

"Ha! that looks bad, indeed," cried Buffalo Bill, hastily.

"When, and where was it, old man?"

"You knows Denny is called the Gold Guide out here, frum the fact that he is allus gittin' up expeditions to go to new gold mines?"

"Well?"

"I know he has gone out with a dozen, and I never heerd that any of them he guided had struck it rich, though I does know that one party got drowned, all but Denny and a few others, and another band was massacred."

"And Denny escaped?"

"Fact did he, Bill."

"The Indians killed them?"

"That was what were said."

"Well?"

"Another party got attacked by road-agents and wiped out and robbed."

"And Denny?"

"He escaped."

"Any more?"

"Not that I knows for sart'in about, Bill, but them is enough ter show ther Denny hain't no safe guide for them he guides, don't you see?"

"I should think that he was a very fatal guide in reality, that is to those he leads."

"But you say you think you have seen him since the time he went out with Captain Champagne?"

"Yes, Bill."

"When?"

"A year ago."

"Where?"

"At the Cross Trails Post."

"Tell us about it, old man."

"Yes, let us know just what reason you have to suspect treachery on the guide's part," urged Lord Mildmay, who had been deeply interested in all the old scout had said, and grew more and more anxious as the words of Buffalo Bill led to the belief that Denny the Gold Guide had proven a traitor.

"It were at the Cross Trails Post, as I said, a year ago, and whar I hed gone in ter sell pelts to ther trader."

"I seen a man come in thar ridin' one horse and with four pack-animals, and heerd he had come ter buy provisions."

"He were changed in face frum ther one I know'd as Denny the Gold Guide, but some how he reminded me so much of him ther I went up to him, hit him on ther back and called him by name."

"What did he do?"

"He jumped same as though ther town officer hed come upon him for crime and his face turned white, but he said he wasn't no darned Denny; nor no friend o' mine."

"If yer hain't him, then yer is dodgin' ther law, as I scared yer mighty bad," says I to him, and I walked away."

"Waal, he got his provisions put up and

lit out that night, but darn me ther more I remembers him, ther more I am willin' ter take oath that it were Denny, ther Gold Guide," and the old scout spoke emphatically.

CHAPTER X.

THE START.

THE recital of the old scout's suspicions regarding Denny the Gold Guide, left an unpleasant feeling in the mind of Lord Mildmay, for it seemed to point, if Denny was the man seen, that his friend had been dealt treacherously with.

Seeing this Buffalo Bill said cheerily:

"Well, what if it was Denny himself that you saw, Old Harry, that only goes to prove that Captain Champagne found him out in his wickedness and drove him out of camp."

"Now my belief is, from all that I have heard, that Captain Champagne is none other than Captain De Villers, that he went with this expedition of seven to the Colorado River country in search of gold, and like others, the party has not since been heard of."

"They may have been massacred by Indians, perhaps were attacked by road-agents and wiped out, it may have been they were treacherously dealt with, led into a trap and murdered, and we may never even know their fate."

"But, on the other hand, as other parties have done, they may have found new mines, struck it rich, and still be laying up treasures, and my idea is that we should start upon their trail, though it is a cold one, and hard to follow, and do all in our power to hunt them down and know just what has been their fate."

"Such is my desire, and my opinion, Buffalo Bill and I say let us start on this trail and stick to it until the truth is known," Lord Mildmay said earnestly.

"I'm with yer," was Old Harry's eager response.

"Yes, I will start on my way at dawn on the morrow, deliver my dispatches, accomplish my mission, and go to meet you at old Fort Maroni, to which Harry here can guide you, my lord."

"You can get your men, horses and stores together to-morrow, and make your first few miles out, so as to give you an early start on the following morning."

"That we will do, and press on by easy marches to Fort Maroni, where you will join us within two weeks, Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, my lord, within that time."

"And Old Harris will tell me just what the outfit needs, in the way of arms, munitions, stores, traps and horses?"

"There is no one better able to tell you, sir, or to select what you need, for Old Harry knows; but I would suggest that you take along several extra horses, for there is no telling what need you may have of them, and I shall do the same."

"And there will be seven of us, all told?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you will bring a like force?"

"From seven to nine, sir."

"And you kin bet, pard, thar won't be no better men to be found than Bill will bring, clean cut, full o' narve, dead shots, who kin foller a bird's trail, ride a horse, shoot ter kill, throw a lariat and outfight any gang o' fellers yer ever met, or will meet, and they'd foller Buffler Bill ter Hades and back just fer ther fun o' it."

Lord Mildmay smiled at this praise of the scout's men and said:

"I have no doubt, Harry, I'll find them all that you say, and I shall be glad to have such splendid allies in the work before us."

"They will do their duty, my lord, as you will find," was Buffalo Bill's modest praise of his men, and soon after the three parted for the night, the scout giving the nobleman a few hints to guide him for his own comfort on the long trail, and just what he might expect to meet with in that wild land of the Indian and the outlaw, of danger and hardships untold.

When Lord Mildmay arose for breakfast the following morning he found that Buffalo Bill had departed several hours before.

Old Harry had gotten up to see him off, and having bidden him good-by and had a confidential chat with him in comparing

notes, he set out on his round of the stores to see where he could secure just what he needed for the expedition.

Lord Mildmay had given him *carte blanche* to purchase all that was needed, without regard to cost, and to secure the best.

He kept his eyes open also for men to take along, and was very much disappointed to find that those he had relied upon finding were away and would not return for some weeks.

It was impossible to delay the start for them, and so he had to select the best he could, though nearly all of them were strangers to him.

He found one man, however, who said that he had just come up from Texas with a herd of cattle and had four splendid fellows with him whom he could recommend, and after seeing them Lord Mildmay and Old Harry decided that they would do, and the next morning, with seven all told in the party, the search expedition pulled out on the trail for Arizona.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN-HUNTERS.

THE expedition of Lord Mildmay was a complete one, as far as outfitting was concerned.

Old Harry had shown himself a good caterer, in the way of getting provisions, and he had secured the very best of horses and equipments.

He had looked to the comfort of Lord Mildmay also, and so threetents were taken along of the style known as A tents, being in the shape of that letter.

One was for Lord Mildmay and his traps, another for the stores and in which Old Harry and the cook could sleep in wet weather, the third being for the other five men of the party.

There were provisions of the very best kind, and enough to last for three months, with ammunition in plenty, repeating rifles, revolvers and several shot-guns for small game.

India-rubber coats and blankets, with plenty of bedding were also carried, so that in rainy or dry weather the searchers would be well protected and cared for.

Half a dozen horses were used as pack-animals, and there were as many more extras besides those ridden by the party, while a couple of fine dogs had been secured to aid in trailing and for better security in guarding the camp, for the keen scent of the dogs would give warning of any unseen danger near them which a man, in the darkness, could not discover.

The first halt was made at noon, some twenty miles out from the town, and during the ride there Lord Mildmay had had a chance to study his men.

Old Harry had openly expressed his disappointment regarding them, for he said:

"They is a unknown quantity, and I never bets on a man until I has seen him tried, and them pilgrims is all strangers ter me."

"Now ther Englishman will stick like a pine pitch plaster, for he shows that in his face, and he'll make a game one in a scrimmage; but them men I does not know."

"Maybe they is all right, and maybe they isn't, but ther proof o' ther puddin' is arter yer hev eat it."

This was said to the landlord of the hotel in the town, but the latter told the old scout that he believed the men would pan out all right.

When the trail was taken, anxious to learn, Lord Mildmay had ridden ahead with Old Harry, and had all explained to him that he wished to familiarize himself with, and the scout was very glad to instruct him.

But, riding ahead he had no opportunity upon the march of seeing the men and knowing them better.

The noonday halt therefor gave him the chance to do so.

The horses showed up well, and that no mistake had been made in their selection.

The cook set to work like one who knew his business and soon had a tempting dinner ready; but when he would have set the nobleman's meal apart for him, Lord Mildmay said:

"Oh no, I chip in, as you say, with the men and we all eat together."

This seemed to please the men, and caused Old Harry to mutter to himself:

"I told yer so."

"Thet English hain't no slouch, and he do know a heap for a tenderfoot, and one too from across the pond."

"I has heerd it said Britishers wants ter make out they knows it all, when what they don't know would fill a mighty big book."

"But this my lord does know and is modest about it as a young gal at her first ball."

The cook having proven himself first-class, the horsewrangler also showing that he knew how to drive horses on a trail, and the camp hustler putting things in shape very well and quickly when the halt was made, Lord Mildmay congratulated himself on four of his men at least, for well he knew what Old Harry was.

There were two others along and they acted as assistant guides, scouts and guards.

One was a Texan, the other a Mexican and both seemed to understand the duties they had to perform.

They were quiet men, having little to say, were well mounted upon their own horses, rode Mexican saddles and bridles, their weapons were of the best and they were handsome fellows as well.

One answered to the name of "Texas Tip," the other calling himself "Mexican Joe."

When the night camp was come to, after a ride of forty miles, and supper was over, Texas Tip and Mexican Joe got out a flute and guitar and began to play.

They sung well together also, and Lord Mildmay congratulated himself upon having gotten together for man-hunters a very genial and sociable lot of men.

CHAPTER XII.

PUT TO THE TEST.

THE third day on the trail, Lord Mildmay was riding ahead with Old Harry, as was his general custom, when he said:

"Well, old man, we have got a good lot of fellows after all for this expedition."

"I hain't proud of 'em, cap'n," answered the old scout, who with the others had taken to calling the English officer "captain," as he was the head of the expedition, and in their opinion deserved the title.

"I do not see why, Pard Harry, for we have been three days and nights on the march, and I never saw a man handle loose horses better than does the wrangler."

"He's good in his way, sart'in."

"And we could not ask for a better attendant than the camp hustler."

"He knows his biz, and does it, cap'n."

"Do you find any objection to the cook?"

"Fu'st class, though maybe he be a leetle Frenchy in his cookin', and French dishes would kill a coyote ef he were put on 'em for steady diet."

"Well, I am satisfied with his cooking, Pard Harry, for his bread is fine, his flap-jacks all that one could ask for, and he broils a steak to a turn."

"He does all that."

"And there is Texas Tip, what a voice ne has, and he plays the flute well."

"Never seen a man what played a flute who would do to tie to; but the fiddle be my choice for real good music."

"But the Texan is a man to be relied on."

"I'll tell yer more when he be put to ther test."

"And the other?"

"Ther Greaser?"

"Mexican Joe, yes."

"Does yer trust him?"

"Why not?"

"Cap'n, I never trusts a man from across the Rio Grande, unless I has hed reason ter know it kin be done."

"He and Tip have given us some pleasant evenings in camp with their music and singing."

"Waal, yas, they has, but somehow I kinder allus thinks o' Injun war-whoops and coyote yelps when I hears them sing in'."

"You are hard indeed ter please, Harry," said Lord Mildmay, with a smile.

"I allus speak of a man as I find him, cap'n, and I'll jist wait ter see how these pan out before I sings the'r praises."

"Now they may be all right, only I doesn't know 'em ter be, and I hain't acquainted with 'em yet."

"If they was friends I knows and wanted fer ther trip, then I could tell yer jist what they was, and I hopes we will find these O. K. when ther horn blows fer action."

"But we was too pressed fer time ter wait for others, and it were these or no one, so they is with us, and I'm playing a waitin' game, an' I may say as well, a watchin' one, for my eyes is open wide."

The nobleman laughed and replied:

"You are right, Harry, and I see that I have the right man in you, so feel every confidence."

"I has been tried, cap'n, and Buffalo Bill vouched fer me and he hain't given ter puttin' his word on one who will back down when death calls him to ther front ter hand in his chips: but does yer know I doesn't half like ther signs I sees about."

"What kind of signs, Harry?"

"Injun signs."

"Ah! you think that there are Indians about?"

"I knows it."

"How so?"

"I has crossed two trails, one going east, t'other west, and they was some five miles apart."

"Now I hain't seen the Texan and Greaser show thet they seen 'em yet, and one trail was made by fully forty ponies and t'other by fifty."

"You are sure they were Indian trails?"

"Sart'in, for ther ponies was not shod."

"Ah! but here comes the Texan."

As Lord Mildmay spoke the Texan came up from the rear at a gallop and said:

"Pard, I saw a trail some miles back of some forty Indian ponies going east, and another just now of half a hundred bound west, and I believe they will circle round, meet and ambush us."

"You is right, Texas, thet is jist what they'll do, so you and Mexico move out ahead on ther flanks, and see ef yer kin git onter the'r hidin' place."

The Texan gave a signal to his Mexican companion, and the two started ahead, keeping a space of half a mile between them.

They soon disappeared from view, but an hour after they came back at a gallop and the Texan reported the Indians, about a hundred strong, ambushed in a cedar thicket through which the trail ran, and added:

"By flanking to the right, sir, we can give them the slip and keep on a ridge where we can make a good stand if attacked."

"We will take the ridge," quietly replied Old Harry, while Lord Mildmay, with a smile of triumph, said in a low tone:

"They have been put to the test and did not fail us, Harry, while they are as cool as icicles."

"Wait until bullets fly and see then," was the muttered response.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER FIRE.

WHEN the little party flanked off to the right, to gain the rocky ridge, and leave the cedar thicket a mile away to the left, Old Harry quickly formed his men in marching order.

The pack-horses were fastened together in single file, the led horses following them, the wrangler leading and the rustler bringing up the rear.

The cook carried swung to his saddle on either side extra rifles and ammunition, and his duty was to load for the others as they needed the weapons.

In the front rode Old Harry, and for his companion he took Mexican Joe, while bringing up the rear was Lord Mildmay, with Texas Tip as his pard.

When they reached the rise they saw the thicket of cedars ahead, and all looked serene there, as though no danger lurked in their depths.

But this quietness lasted only for a moment, for seeing that the party had left the trail and were avoiding them, they knew that their presence there was either known or suspected, and that they must reveal themselves.

This they did with sudden yells and a dash out of the thicket, directly across the valley and up toward the rocky ridge.

They were seen to be well mounted, though their ponies had a jaded look and they were about four-score in number.

"Open with your long range rifles, pards, take good aim, and don't waste no bullets by puttin' two in one Injun where one will do ther biz."

"As we will halt here ter fire, all but ther cook kin chip in in ther powder and lead music."

"When they reaches yonder rocks, open fire, for I'll start ther ball," and without noticing that he had made an excellent pun, Old Harry glanced at the men with something of anxiety in his look, for, as he had said, they were "an unknown quantity."

His glance revealed Lord Mildmay seated upright in his saddle, a repeating rifle that he had brought down sepoy with in India, and elephants and tigers as well, ready to open fire.

His face was serene his fine eyes sparkling with the prospect of battle.

Texas Tip and Mexican Joe were none the less cool, and looked like men to whom the art of killing their fellows was by no means new.

The wrangler and hustler were ready too, no anxiety being shown by either, while the cook was prepared to load weapons as fast as they were handed to him.

On came the red-skins at a run, their yell's echoing against the ridge, and their appearance most dangerous as in such heavy force they rushed down the slope, to then ascend the ridge and attack.

The halt had been made among some large bowlders, and these protected the led horses and pack-animals from the fire of the red-skins.

But promptly the rifle of Old Harry rose to his shoulder, his horse stood as still as a statue, and with a quick aim came a puff of smoke, a report, and a bullet was sent upon its mission.

Every eye beheld how true the aim, for the chief in advance threw his hands up above his head, waved them wildly, and, before a warrior could catch him, fell in a heap from his horse, the rushing ponies passing over him.

"A long range, splendid shot—bravo!" cried Lord Mildmay, and as his rifle went up to his shoulder the others did the same, including Harry's once more.

Six shots rung out almost together, and as many deadly bullets went on their errands.

Here and there a horse went down, and a brave toppled from his saddle as the rifles rattled forth death now with startling rapidity.

The charging red-skins had not looked for such a long range fire, nor for repeating rifles in the hands of all their foes, and the cavalcade swayed wildly and suddenly turned to the right about in a flying retreat.

Hot after them flew the bullets, and the aim of the pale-faces was deadly.

But suddenly the red-skins wheeled again and once more came on with a rush, firing as they came, the few rifles they had, and also sending showers of arrows upon their foes.

One arrow struck Lord Mildmay in the shoulder, another hit Texas Tip in the hip, and a couple of horses fell under the red-skins' fire before the terrible leaden hail poured upon them by the repeating rifles caused them, when not a hundred yards away, to turn about as though on pivots and ride for their lives in retreat.

Then Old Harry, with Lord Mildmay, Texas Tip and Mexican Joe pursued and threw bullets into the thicket so hotly that they sent the red-skins flying out of there.

"Come, pards, it's ten miles to a camp whar we kin be safe for ther night, and we'll git thar, though I does not believe them reds will foller us."

"Yer see we has hit them hard, and our long range rifles keeps them away off, so they has about all they wishes."

"Pards, I is glad ter see yer has smelt powder afore and hain't afeerd o' ther music made by flyin' lead," and he looked particularly at Texas Tip and Mexican Joe as he spoke.

The light wounds received by Lord Mildmay and Texas Tip were speedily dressed, and then at a quickened pace the party held along the ridge for several miles, descended into a valley and camped on a small stream where they were splendidly protected against attack and could beat off twenty red-skins to one if they made another charge upon them.

But night came on and not a red-skin had

been seen to be following upon their trail, which caused Old Harry to say:

"A dozen dead warriors, a score of ponies, and a number of wounded men, is a lesson they won't soon forgit, pards."

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFFALO BILL AND GENERAL MILES.

BRIGHT and early Buffalo Bill left the little New Mexican frontier town on the mission that had taken him through there. He had been much pleased with the English officer and felt certain that he would find him all that he appeared, though, with the proofs, apparently, told him regarding the condemned man in England being Captain Trevor De Villers, he felt sure there could hardly be any mistake.

To save his honorable name from disgrace he had pleaded innocent of the charge that he was De Villers, and for reasons best known to himself, he had denied knowing his old friend Mildmay.

That is the way the scout looked at the matter, and he was urged to this by the fact that De Villers's letter showed that he had come to the United States, that he had sought the Wild West, and had said that it would either break him or wreck him.

Failing in finding the hoped-for fortune, with no news from home, he had doubtless gone to sea and been engaged in the mutiny that ended in his arrest, trial and condemnation.

Still, looking at it in that light, he yet was anxious to go with the nobleman to set the matter fully at rest as to whether the condemned man was really De Villers, if he had met with a violent death on the frontier, or might still be alive and in distress, unable to regain civilization.

The mysterious fate attending the several parties who had gone, especially the one of which De Villers was the ruling spirit, caused the scout to be anxious to solve the mystery thoroughly, especially as old Harry Haphazard had reported that he believed he had really seen Denny the Gold Guide since their departure for the mines.

"We can at least get at the bottom facts of just what has happened to those who have taken those gold trails, and perhaps aid some poor fellows out of a scrape who may be there in that really unknown country," said Buffalo Bill as he rode on his way.

When night fell the scout was well upon his way to his destination, the last of the line of outposts in the military district commanded by the general officer under whom Buffalo Bill was then serving.

Having delivered his dispatches, which were of an important nature, the scout started after a day's rest, back to his starting point, the military headquarters.

On his way he went along the same trail, stopping at a line of outposts for the return dispatches, and again halted for the night in the little town where he had met Lord Mildmay.

He heard of the departure, three days before of the expedition under the guidance of Old Harry, but could learn nothing of the men who had gone with them, and this made him a little anxious, for the situation was such that those who went on dangerous trails must be well acquainted with their companions.

The scout continued on his way, making his halts when necessity for rest and food and duty demanded, and reached the military headquarters late one afternoon.

He at once went to the quarters of General Miles* and delivering his dispatches made his report.

General Miles, a tall, soldierly-looking man, received the scout with a cordial greeting, for Buffalo Bill was a man in whom he had the greatest confidence.

He heard the scout's story of his trip and, as Buffalo Bill still lingered he asked:

"Well, Cody, what is it, for you have something to communicate."

"At your leisure, sir."

"These dispatches are not urgent, so let me hear what you have to say."

"Well, general, I wish to state that I met at R—in New Mexico, an English army

officer, Lord St. John Mildmay, who has come to this country upon a special mission."

"Ah, yes," and reaching over to his table General Miles took up a letter and said:

"I have seen a communication from the Secretary of War referring to Colonel Lord Mildmay and requesting that I give him all aid within my power in the accomplishment of the mission that has brought him to this country."

"Here is a letter to you from him, sir, with letters of introduction from several personal friends, and he bade me give them to you and ask if you would allow me to guide him on the expedition he is now starting upon?"

"You met him at R—?"

"Yes, sir."

"A fine fellow, I judge, from all I have heard of him?"

"He is indeed, sir, and every inch a soldier, one who has seen hard service in India and Africa."

"Yes, he has a brilliant record; but why did he go by R—?"

"A letter he has gave him information that it was from there that the one he seeks started for the gold mines, or rather to seek gold among the canyons of the Colorado River."

"Well, Cody, you can go, certainly, but you had better take a good force along, for you know the dangers to be encountered."

"I would like to take eight of my men, general."

"All right, pick them; but when do you start?"

"In two days, sir."

"Very well, draw on the commissary and quartermaster for all you need."

"Where do you join Lord Mildmay?"

"At the old Mormon Fort of Maroni, sir, in Arizona."

"You go into a very dangerous locality Cody, so be cautious."

CHAPTER XV.

THE VOLUNTEER OFFICER.

BUFFALO BILL took the advice of General Miles and picked his men.

He picked his horses as well, for he knew what was before him.

The scouts he selected were all a splendid lot of fellows, rough riders, dead shots, of iron physique and possessed in the fullest sense of true courage.

Any one of them could mount and ride a wild mustang, throw a lasso unerringly, hit dead center with rifle and revolver, and had records of daring deeds and fierce encounters.

The men were all splendidly mounted, several extra horses were carried along, and pack-horses were supplied with all provisions and equipments needed for the long trail, which might extend to several months.

The party rode away from the fort early on the morning set for their start, and took the trail southward to Fort Wingate.

There a stop was to be made of a day, for rest and to get ready for pushing on into the country where they would find no white men, no succor, and have to face the deadliest of dangers.

But the bold scouts of the border had no dread of going where duty called them, and with Buffalo Bill as their leader were willing to go wherever he led the way.

They expected of course to find at the old Mormon fort the party of Lord Mildmay, three days' ride from Fort Wingate, and then they would have their force increased by seven good men.

Arriving at Fort Wingate, Buffalo Bill reported to the commanding officer and delivered the letter from General Miles.

"Well, Cody, I am glad to see you, but I can not say that I am glad to see you going upon this expedition, for I consider it foolhardy in the extreme," said Colonel Baldwin, in welcoming the scout.

"You consider it more hazardous now, sir, than before?"

"Yes, for the Navahoes are in a very ugly humor, not to speak of the other tribes, and you are going into what may be called a *terra incognita*."

"Lord Mildmay passed north of here some fifty miles, but sent a scout with a letter to me, and I returned my opinion of the expedition and fears, unless a force of soldiers were sent large enough to fight off the red-

* General Nelson A. Miles, one of the most distinguished of Indian-fighters, a man with a brilliant war record, a splendid soldier and courteous gentleman.—THE AUTHOR.

skins; but this he had already refused from the Secretary of War, for he says that he will risk no body of soldiers on his mission, only take those he can personally secure for value received, save in your case, Cody."

"I believe, sir, I would be better pleased to have a force of soldiers with us, but yet if we can not fight we can retreat."

"Yes I am only satisfied to see the party go as you are to be the leader; but General Miles suggests, out of compliment to the British officer, if for nothing else, I send any officer who cares to volunteer to go, along with a sergeant and six men, and that will augment your force materially."

"It will, sir, and I will be glad to have the increased force."

"But remember, Cody, the officer who goes is merely an honorary escort to Lord Mildmay as a British soldier, and will no more have command than does the Englishman, for you are the leader, though of course will consult with whoever may go."

"Have you thought of any one, Colonel Baldwin?"

"Well, I know one who would gladly volunteer, for he is a daring fellow, a splendid soldier and an experienced Indian-fighter, young as he is."

"He belongs to the infantry, it is true, but he is as fine a rider as there is in the cavalry, and is, further, a friend and admirer of yours."

"I was going to suggest Lieutenant Robert F. Ames,* of the infantry, sir."

"The very man I had in mind."

"I am glad you are pleased with my selection."

"Orderly!"

The orderly appeared and was sent to request the presence of Lieutenant Robert Ames at headquarters.

He soon appeared, a handsome young man with true soldierly bearing, expressive, determined face and the eye of an eagle.

He saluted his superior officer and shook hands cordially with Buffalo Bill.

"Mr. Ames, I sent for you to ask how you would like to go upon a very hazardous expedition with a very small force?"

"I should be delighted, sir, especially, as I believe, Buffalo Bill is to be the guide and scout," promptly answered the officer.

"He is to do so, in fact, command, you going as an escort, representing the army, to Colonel Lord St. John Mildmay of the British Lancer Guards."

"Nothing could please me more, sir."

"Remember, it is a very perilous trail you take."

"I am ready, sir."

"Select a sergeant and six men to accompany you and be ready to depart day after to-morrow."

"I thank you, Colonel Baldwin, for the honor done me," and Lieutenant Ames departed, leaving the scout once more alone with the colonel. †

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCOUTS TAKE THE TRAIL.

"WELL, Cody, have you decided which trail to take from here?"

"I'll tell you the situation exactly, lieutenant," and Buffalo Bill dismounted from his horse in camp, where Lieutenant Ames, his soldiers, and most of the scouts, had halted for the night, their second day out from the fort.

The position was upon a hilltop, well wooded and with a stream at its base, a rare thing to find in that almost waterless country.

"Well, out with it, Bill," and Lieutenant Ames lighted his pipe and leaned back against a tree to listen.

"By going north, sir, we could cross the trail of Lord Mildmay and his party, and follow it on to Maroni; but that would take us almost a day's ride out of our way."

"And accomplish nothing?"

"Well, it would show us whether they had gone along or not."

"You think there is any doubt of their doing so?"

* Captain R. F. Ames, now on special duty in the Columbian Guard at the World's Fair, and a splendid officer.
—THE AUTHOR.

† Colonel Frank L. Baldwin, now of General Miles's staff, and an officer of distinction.
—THE AUTHOR.

"I do not, and yet you know the best laid plans miscarry in this country."

"Very true; but now to the other trail?"

"We can reach the old fort by to-morrow night, sir, for you see the snow-clad peaks of San Francisco Mountains ahead of us now."

"And the water?"

"We cross a couple of streams during the day, sir."

"And the other trail?"

"We are most likely to run upon a band of red-skins."

"And that would delay our joining Lord Mildmay?"

"It might, sir."

"Well, I should say push right on to-morrow to Fort Maroni, and if the party are there we are all right, and if not we can either await their coming, or go out to meet them; but do as you deem best in the matter."

"They should be there, sir, yes, several days ago, and it is my opinion to push on for the old fort to-morrow, and there decide what is best should the Mildmay party not be there."

"Your scouts seem to be of the same opinion, for I overheard them speaking about it."

"Yes, sir, and so it will be for Fort Maroni on the morrow."

"We have not seen an Indian thus far, and I trust Lord Mildmay has been as fortunate."

"They have been, sir, unless they have run upon a roving band of red-skins, prowling or hunting."

"But Old Harry is as good a scout and guide as they could have, and I feel no anxiety for them as long as he is the leader."

"Yes, I know the man and he is a good one; but what force has Mildmay with him?"

"Seven, all told."

"And you have eight scouts with you, nine all told, while I have a sergeant, corporal and eight men, so that, altogether, we will number twenty-seven. A very respectable force after all, and we need hardly fear the red-skins at ten to one against us."

"Not with our new repeating, long-range rifles, sir, and many of us have extra ones that will count in a hot fight, lieutenant."

"Indeed they will, Cody," answered the handsome young officer, and soon after supper was announced by the cook, and the lieutenant and Buffalo Bill messed together.

The night passed without any alarm, the sentinels seeing nothing more dangerous than prowling coyotes, and the mount was made at dawn, a ten-mile march being made before breakfast.

Then there was a halt of an hour, and at two o'clock a stay of two hours for rest and dinner.

San Francisco Mountains loomed up grandly now ahead and to the right, and the horses were kept at an easy trot to reach the old Maroni Fort before nightfall.

Sweeping through a narrow valley, while the sun was yet an hour high, the party came out into a plain surrounded by a lofty range, the mountains on the right hand towering far up into the clouds.

The plain was treeless and extended to the foot hills on one side, the mountains on the other, while there was a stream not far distant.

In the center of this large plain was a group of log cabins surrounded by a stockade wall, and this was Fort Maroni, the one-time halting place of Brigham Young and his followers on their march up into Utah.

There they had dwelt for quite a while, protecting themselves against attacks by the Indians, and cultivating the fertile land for vegetables with which to continue their further way to the north.

Buffalo Bill was in advance and by his side was Lieutenant Ames, and both looked eagerly toward the old deserted fort to see some sign of those whom they had come there to join.

But no horses were staked out to graze, no smoke circled up from the chimney, and all was still in the old Mormon resting-place.

The Mildmay party under the guidance of Old Harry had not arrived, yet were days overdue.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN A QUANDARY.

WHEN they realized that the old fort was unoccupied, that those they had expected to find there were not visible, Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Ames, in their anxiety, rode forward at a gallop.

For once the scout forgot his caution in his desire to find out why their friends were not there, and not until they dashed into the stockade gate did Buffalo Bill realize his mistake and cry out:

"That time I did very wrong, for suppose an ambush had been waiting for us here."

"You are right, Bill, and it would not have surprised me had there been; but neither of us thought of that in our desire to know why the Mildmay party had not arrived."

"They are not here, lieutenant."

"No."

"And have not been."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, for they would have left some sign for us had they been."

"They have been delayed."

"By Indians doubtless; but I hope they have been able to stand them off."

"Well, they may get in to-night, but should they not do so?"

"We can do but one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Go on the hunt for them."

"I am ready."

"No, lieutenant, I will go with six of my men, and you had better remain here to strengthen up the old post and guard the stores."

"I will leave two of my men with you, and if we have to retreat we have you to fall back on."

"And where will you go?"

"On the trail that it was agreed by Old Harry and myself that they should travel."

"If they have not been wiped out we will meet them within a day or two's ride, or corralled somewhere fighting off the red-skins."

"If the red-skins are in force?"

"I'll dash in with my scouts, sir, and should we not return within five days, you can take our trail and come to our support, and a second coming of reinforcements I am sure will convince the Indians that a larger force is at hand and cause them to move off."

"You know best, Bill, and I will be guided by your judgment; but I hope that Mildmay and his men will come in to-night, or you will meet them to-morrow."

"I hope so, sir, but it looks bad to me, this not finding them here."

"And you lay it all to Indians?"

"I am not so sure of that, sir."

"You are aware that the missing of several gold-hunting parties is attributed to a band of Gold Robbers who make the rounds of the mining-camps and hang upon the trails?"

"Yes, sir, I have seen them and met them."

"We have had several hunts for them, but they always eluded us most cleverly, and I'd like to get a chance at them now with you and your scouts along, Cody."

"I hope that we may, sir; but, lieutenant, have you ever heard any rumors of the Skeleton Scout?"

"Have I not, Bill?"

"Why, he has been the talk of the camps at times."

"Does any one know who or what he is?"

"My idea is that he is some crazy wild man who hangs about the trails, perhaps some gold-hunter who has been crazed in his search for gold, or by finding it, but is harmless."

"How does he subsist, sir?"

"Ah! that is the question."

"What do you think, Bill?"

"I do not know, sir, just what to think, though I hope we may find him this trip."

"It would be a feather in our cap surely; but here come the men."

The force now came up and disappointment was upon every face, mingled with anxiety at not finding the other party there.

The order was given to go into regular camp, and the log cabins furnished good quarters for the men, while within the stockade wall and on the plain surrounding, the

grass was long and juicy, with water near at hand.

For some reason the wild animals did not frequent the deserted fort of the Mormons, leaving it as desolate and alone as the little fenced in plot, shaded by a *pinon* tree, where were the graves of the Mormons who had died there.

Fires were now blazing brightly, the horses turned out to feed within the stockade, the broken gateways being repaired to keep them from straying, and the cooks were busy preparing supper.

That night the log walls of the deserted fort echoed to the songs of the cowboys, and the sounds of the guitar, violin and banjo, and Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Ames sunk to sleep lulled by the music that fell upon their ears.

Sentinels were placed, and by nine o'clock the camp was quiet as a graveyard, but with the coming of the midnight hour all were startled by a piercing cry out upon one of the posts occupied by a soldier guard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT.

FEELING comparatively secure in the old fort, only two sentinels were placed on duty, one at each entrance to the stockade and on the outside, where their eyes could take in the sweep of the plain in every direction.

The stockade was some three acres in size, and the horses being allowed to graze within the walls were safe.

One of the sentinels was a soldier, the other a scout, for Lieutenant Ames insisted that he and his men should do their share of duty throughout the expedition, which caused the scouts to remark:

"That officer isn't no play soldier, but a man clean through."

The soldier had the post overlooking the plain toward the San Francisco Mountains, and he paced his beat to and fro with military regularity, now and then halting to gaze out over the level expanse, then to look upward at the towering peaks and again lulled to momentary forgetfulness of where he was by the music of the scouts.

The music and the songs they sung carried him back in memory to boyhood days, when his mother had sung the same old airs, when he had heard his sweetheart far away in dear old Vermont sing to him ballads then pouring into his ears with sweetest melody, as a soft tenor voice floated out upon the night air.

Tears came to his eyes as he recalled that the father he had revered, the mother he had so dearly loved, were then in their graves among the Vermont hills, that a fond sister was married and dwelling afar from the old hearthstone, the sweetheart who was his idol lay in the village churchyard, having died upon the very threshold of womanhood, while he a wild youth had believed himself ill-treated there, and running away from his happy boyhood's home, had become a wanderer.

What would he not have given time and again to have gone back to that dear old spot, to have been by the bedside of his dying parents, to have seen his sister a happy bride, and to have been able to have placed flowers upon the grave of the little sweetheart.

But, no, he had wandered far from home, had not risen in the world, fortune had not come to him, and at last he had enlisted in the army as a private soldier when he felt that he was upon the very eve of wrecking his life forever.

Leaning against the stockade wall and resting his hands crossed upon his rifle muzzle, the soldier shed bitter tears, for memory would haunt him with the cruel past.

The music died away, the sound of voices in camp became hushed and soon all was quiet.

Still leaning against the wall, supporting himself upon his rifle, his eyes became heavy and he almost lost consciousness in sleep, good soldier though he was.

His position was an easy one, he had had a long ride of it that day, the breeze was balmy and soothing, and there was no threatening danger, so that he was lulled into security, and sleep hung heavily on his eyelids.

Thus time passed away, the soldier ever and anon arousing himself as from instinct,

to glance about him, and again sinking into the same dreamy repose.

At last something seemed to arouse him, but what he did not know.

He appeared to feel a human presence near.

He still kept his position, with his back against the stockade, but he was awake now, his eyes wide open, his senses all acute.

Then, the presence which he had felt, he now saw.

Not far from him, visible in the starlight, and the stars shine brightly there and the air is clear as crystal, he beheld a form.

Could he believe his eyes that he beheld what appeared to him to be a *skeleton form*?

He gazed in horror upon it.

He saw the white skull, the skeleton form, the arms, the legs all, and with painful, startling distinctness.

Was it a dream, or was he awake?

It must be some hallucination, some hideous nightmare, for surely a skeleton form like a dead man long killed, could not walk the earth.

He had a strong vein of superstition in his nature, and there would crowd upon him the belief that he was in the power of a dead man, or at least his spirit form.

It seemed that he could behold a misty shroud, like a snowy cloud waving about his form.

He stood like one transfixed, unable to move.

But at last he felt that he must move, he must shake himself together, must see if he was sleeping or waking.

With a mighty effort he made a move and stood upright.

Then he brought his rifle to a ready, and still stood staring at the weird object.

But still it stood there, upright, silent and with the misty shroud waving about it.

With another effort he spoke.

"I am surely awake," he said, and he spoke aloud.

His voice seemed hoarse and strange to him.

Then he coughed, and watched the result.

The skeleton form still stood, silent and motionless.

"Halt! who comes there?" suddenly rung out in the soldier's deepest tones, and the answer promptly came:

"The dead!"

And then was uttered that wild cry that caused the camp to rally in alarm and Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Ames to hasten to the soldiers' post of duty.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHASING A PHANTOM.

BUFFALO BILL was the first to reach the stockade barrier, and, rifle in hand he leaped over it and beheld the sentinel upon the ground.

Lieutenant Ames was close upon his heels and as the scout glanced about him he beheld the officer, while the others were running to positions to fight off an attack.

The scout who was the other sentinel called out:

"All quiet here!" so that the interest all centered upon the position occupied by the soldier.

That he was dead, when he saw him prostrate upon the ground, Buffalo Bill certainly believed, and he glanced about for his slayer, while Lieutenant Ames knelt by the side of the man.

"Bill, he is not dead, for he is rallying."

"See to him, please, lieutenant, while I take a scout around the stockade," said Cody, and he at once walked away in the darkness, then halted and called out:

"One of you scouts bring me my horse with all haste."

Then to the lieutenant he added, as his eyes were gazing over the plain:

"I certainly saw a form flying along yonder, and I will pursue as far as I dare."

The lieutenant would have checked him, but just then a scout dashed up with his horse, and throwing himself into his saddle Buffalo Bill rode off like the wind, calling out:

"Several of you follow me, Lasso Lil."

While the scout addressed, the one who had brought the horse, ran back to the stockade to obey, Buffalo Bill rode on in the

direction in which he had seen the fleeting form.

The motion of his horse rendered his gaze unsteady, but he distinctly saw a form ahead going at great speed over the plain.

He was not far from the shadows at the base of the mountain, and strange to say, was flying along directly for the little white fence that inclosed the graves of the Mormons buried there.

On sped the scout, urging his horse to his utmost, and the splendid animal, fleet as a deer, was gaining upon the flying form, fast as it was running.

Gazing more fixedly at it as he approached nearer, and confident that he could overtake it, the scout was surprised at what he saw.

It seemed to him that the one who was running away from him wore a snowy garment, almost misty in its texture, and he saw what appeared to be a weird, greenish, spectral light seeming to hover about it.

He could have opened fire with his rifle, but wished to capture the fugitive alive.

So he did not make use of his weapons, trusting in the speed of his horse only.

Nearer and nearer the fugitive and pursuer approached the shadows of the range, and Buffalo Bill began to realize how much he was risking in the way of being led into an ambush, so determined to call a halt.

"Halt, or I fire!" he cried in a voice that rung out over the plain, penetrating far beyond the ears of the fugitive.

Almost instantly the shadowy form halted, turned about and threw its arms above its head, while in sepulchral tones came the words:

"Hold, Buffalo Bill!"

"You follow Death!"

Hardly had the scout in his amazement heard the words, when his eyes fell upon the form and beheld the white outline of a skeleton, the bones being marked with a spectral glare that rendered them distinctly visible.

Involuntarily he had drawn hard upon his rein, but just as he did so his horse went down heavily, hurling him far over his head, so unexpected was the fall.

The scout, agile as a panther though he was, was unable to catch himself, or break his fall and he fell heavily, striking so hard that the breath was momentarily knocked from his body and his head received a severe blow that partially stunned him.

It was full a minute before he arose.

Passing his hand across his brow several times, it seemed to bring back his senses, and he saw his horse standing silent not far distant, as though he was ashamed of falling.

Then his mind flashed upon the fugitive form, and turning quickly toward the spot where he had last seen it he discovered that it was gone.

At this instant there came the rapid clatter of hoofs and up dashed several scouts at full speed.

Halting by the side of their chief they saw that he rose with difficulty, as though severely hurt.

CHAPTER XX.

A MYSTERY STILL.

THE scouts sprung to the side of their chief in alarm, Lasso Lil calling out:

"Are you wounded, chief, for we heard no shot?"

"No, only a fall, for my horse went down into something and I am anxious to discover what it is."

"You are hurt, sir."

"Oh, no, merely a bad shake-up, and the fall half stunned me."

"The ground is soft and I will not feel any bad effects from it," and Buffalo Bill walked over to the spot where his horse had fallen.

There he beheld a deep, narrow hole in the ground.

"It is a grave and open," he said thoughtfully, and then he glanced about him and continued:

"It was just in my trail too, and my horse got his fore feet into it without seeing it."

"There is no dirt near it, that having been taken away, and it was not recently dug either."

"But it's a grave, sure," said Lasso Lil.

"Yes, and I saw the body that belongs in it," said the scout impressively.

"You saw the body, chief?" asked the scouts together.

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"Do you see yonder white fence?"

"Yes, sir."

"It incloses some graves."

"Mormons."

"True; but the one I followed was running for that place and led me across that open grave yonder."

"My horse fell into it, and when I got my senses I saw that my ghost was gone."

"Your ghost, chief?"

"Call it what you please, Lasso Lil, but I saw the Skeleton Scout."

The three scouts started at this.

They knew their chief too well to feel that he would joke about a serious subject.

They had all heard of the Skeleton Scout, and had guyed the idea that there was such an object.

But now their chief told them that he had seen the Skeleton Scout, and they were more than interested.

In a few words he told them just what he had beheld, and added:

"To follow further now would be useless, and besides we might run into an ambush and be shot down."

"To-morrow we will have a hunt for the Skeleton Scout, taking his trail."

"Now we will go back to the fort, and mark my words, that sentinel saw what I did."

He mounted his horse as though still bruised by the fall, and the party rode back to the stockade.

Lieutenant Ames was with the soldier sentinel, who had now returned to consciousness, and he called out:

"He fainted, Cody, and it was hard to fetch him round, and now his brain must be affected, for he says that he saw a ghost."

"He did see one, Lieutenant Ames."

"What do you mean, Cody?"

"You have heard of a phantom form that haunts the trails in this country, lieutenant, and known as the Skeleton Scout?"

"Oh, yes, I have heard of such a form."

"That was it, sir, for I saw his skeleton form distinctly," cried the soldier, and he added:

"Yes, sir, yes, it was a spirit from Spirit-land."

"It was spirit from a distillery, Watkins, and you surrounded too much of it."

"I thought you had given up drinking," said Lieutenant Ames, sternly.

"I have, sir, for I never touch liquor now."

"No, lieutenant, he did see what he says, for I also saw it, and chased a phantom, as I know to my cost."

"He led my horse over an open grave, directly for the Mormon burying-ground, and I had a fall that I still suffer from."

"The form appeared misty, like one clothed in a vail, and when I called a halt, it turned, raised its arms and I beheld, by the aid of some spectral light, a skeleton form, while I heard the words, in answer to my command:

"You follow Death, Buffalo Bill."

"Ha! it called you by name?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you make of it, Cody?"

"That it is the one who is masquerading as the Skeleton Scout."

"Doubtless; but for what purpose?"

"That is to be seen, sir, as we continue our trail."

Turning quickly to the soldier, in his frank-hearted way, ever ready to acknowledge a wrong, Lieutenant Ames said:

"I am sorry I wronged you, Watkins, and beg your pardon."

"It's granted, sir, and I do not wonder that you doubted me, for ghosts are not seen often, and I don't care to meet with another one, for it unnerved me completely, sir."

"I tried to give an alarm, as I gazed upon it, then my brain grew dizzy and I knew no more."

"Chief Cody, I thank you, sir, for vouching for it that what I saw was really a skeleton form," and the voice of the soldier was still steady.

"Well, Watkins, forget it now and go to your blankets, for I will put another man in your place," and having made the detail Lieutenant Ames walked off with Buffalo Bill and when the two were alone together he asked:

"What does it mean, Bill?"

CHAPTER XXI.

NO TRAIL FOUND.

BUFFALO BILL did not immediately answer the question of Lieutenant Ames.

After he had discovered that he was only bruised, no bones broken, no cuts, and not seriously hurt, he said:

"Lieutenant, you know that I no more believe in superstition than you do."

"Very true, Cody."

"To say that what I saw was a ghost, or a skeleton form, would be ridiculous, for such could not be."

"None of those whom I have ever seen die, none of the brave fellows whom I saw fall, and all that are now in their graves, friends or foes, have ever come back to me in spirit form, unless perhaps in a dream, so I know that there is no use in believing that the dead can come back to us."

"Yet you saw a skeleton form?"

"Ah, yes, and a perfect one, as far as I could see."

"It was fine masquerading, and it led me to the Mormon grave yard, and as I said, across the open grave that gave me a fall."

"The skeleton was making tracks for his grave evidently," said Lieutenant Ames laughing.

"Yes, but forgot to get into it, for it was empty."

"Maybe he was a Mormon?"

"Maybe he was; but we'll see by his trail in the morning."

"You expect to trail your ghost then, Cody?"

"Oh yes, ghosts that prowl now-a-days leave tracks."

"But you challenged him?"

"Yes, sir, and he replied to me."

"How do ghosts' voices sound?"

"Somewhat sepulchral, sir; certainly the one I heard had a warning in it."

"And he knew you?"

"Yes, sir."

"But now tell what you make out of this strange appearance?"

"It is some one masquerading for a purpose that I am determined to find out, sir, and I will begin in the morning," was the scout's reply and Lieutenant Ames rejoined:

"That means that a ghost is to be captured, for when you speak in that tone you will do all you set out to perform."

"Now let us see if we can get a few hours' more sleep, without having our rest broken by prowling ghosts," and the two friends were soon fast asleep again.

The scouts and soldiers had quickly given up guying the sentinel after hearing Buffalo Bill's report, and they turned in for some sleep, while the poor fellow, who had been so alarmed, did not find it an easy matter to close his eyes in slumber.

When the guards were again on duty, they kept a very close watch, after what had happened, and were in dread that they too might behold the Skeleton Scout.

But the night passed away without any more disturbance, and after an early breakfast Buffalo Bill mounted his horse to go on his search for Lord Mildmay and his party.

With Lieutenant Ames and Lasso Lil, who were to remain at the fort, he went in search of the Skeleton Scout's trail.

The soldier pointed out just where he had stood when he had seen him, and then closely looked over the ground.

But not the trace of a trail was found.

Then they followed along the trail left by Buffalo Bill's horse, and halted when it reached the open grave.

There were the marks where the animal had fallen, his fore feet just breaking in the edge, but no other tracks were visible.

There was no loose dirt about the grave, which had evidently been dug some time before, perhaps a year or more.

From the grave they went to the little inclosure, and the white headboards, put there by the Mormons, were read over.

The inside of the little fence had become overgrown with weeds and some trees, yet they afforded no hiding-place for any one there, and a glance revealed that no man could take refuge there and not be seen.

The graves were grass grown and neglected for a long while.

Not the slightest trail could be found from there, of man or beast, and Buffalo Bill said:

"I'll leave you, lieutenant, with Lil, to

hunt for the ghost's trail, while I push on with my pards to try and find the Mildmay party."

"If you do not hear of us, sir, in three days, please send Lasso Lil and several more of the men, and follow as we agreed upon, after a short while, with the balance of the force."

"All right, Bill, we will not delay long in following your trail."

"Good-by, and luck to you," said the lieutenant, and Buffalo Bill rode rapidly on after his four scouts, who had gone on ahead.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOUND.

THE chief of scouts rode on in a quandary, following the four men who had gone ahead, for he had told them the trail he intended to take.

He felt a little stiff and sore after his fall, but not enough to give him much inconvenience.

What worried him was the sight of the Skeleton Scout the night before.

Duty demanded that he should go on at once in search of Lord Mildmay's party, for they were overdue several days, even had they marched ever so slow.

Yet he had longed to solve the mystery of the Skeleton Scout, and must leave that apparition, or whatever it might be, behind him, with the hope that Lieutenant Ames and Lasso Lil might find out what it was.

The fact that the Mildmay party had not arrived at the fort told him that something was wrong, that more than any ordinary cause had prevented their coming, when they had such a guide as was Old Harry Hap-hazard.

"If they were delayed from any ordinary reason Old Harry would surely have sent a courier on to let me know, or if in danger, one to ask for help if he could reach me."

"I really feel anxious at their not coming, and shall push on as rapidly as I can to learn just what it is that detains them."

"Come, pards, we must strike a swifter pace than this," he called out as he overtook the four scouts, and placing himself at their head he set the pace they were to travel.

The more he thought it over, that some serious trouble had befallen the Mildmay party, the more anxious the scout became for their safety.

With every confidence in Old Harry, he yet was convinced that there might be a larger force of Indians meeting them than the small force could cope with.

He did not believe that they had been wiped out, but he did fear that they were corralled somewhere, standing off an attacking party of Indians.

Equipped thoroughly as they were, and with the old scout to direct them, Buffalo Bill knew that they might fortify themselves strongly and keep a very large force at bay for days, so he was desirous of getting on as rapidly as possible to their relief.

The scouts held steadily on until afternoon, when Buffalo Bill called a halt, feeling that they had placed at least thirty miles between them and the fort, and he found a good place to refill the canteens with fresh water and where grass was plentiful.

After an hour's halt they were again in the saddle and it was just sunset when they camped for the night out on the open plain.

There was not a blade of grass within many miles, or a drop of water save what they had in their canteens, while they had nothing with which to build a fire so had to eat a cold supper.

Ever humane toward his horses, Buffalo Bill had his men carry a large canteen for them alone, and half of this was given them at night, the rest being kept for the morning.

A quart of water for a thirsty horse was not a drop, so to speak, but it moistened the parched throat and gave relief.

At dawn they were again in the saddle and before noon came to some woodland where there was a spring and plenty of grass.

Deer, antelope and wolves darted out of the timber as they came up, and sped away over the plains in alarm.

But a shot from Buffalo Bill's rifle brought down a fine antelope and half an hour after some juicy steaks were being broiled upon the coals, a pot of coffee was boiling, some

crackers toasting and there was a promise of a hearty breakfast, while the horses were enjoying also a feast.

The waters of the springs were icy cold and a bath greatly refreshed the scouts, who, after several hours' halt rode on, determined not to camp again until nightfall.

"We must meet them by night, for the delay can hardly have been beyond the *mesa* we reach by sunset," said Buffalo Bill as they once more took the saddle, men and horses greatly refreshed and rested.

After going a few miles the scout discovered a trail, comparatively fresh.

"Indians, and about fifty of them; see, they make a turn and go the way we do."

They pushed on a little more rapidly now, for the discovery of the trail seemed to be a reason for the delay of the Mildmay party.

When the sun was yet an hour high they ascended a range, and the sight that met their gaze caused the bronzed face of Buffalo Bill to turn very pale, for a glance seemed to indicate that they had found their party—dead!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FATAL CAMP.

THE spot they had come upon was a clump of timber in a valley through which swept a brook of clearest water.

The nature of the country had changed, for cliffs were in the distance, around the base of which the same stream wound, a range of hills were also visible and the barren, arid look was not visible as it had been the way the scouts had come.

In the timber there was the evidence of a camp, as the scouts approached, and spurring forward they had come upon the scene that had so startled them all, for Buffalo Bill believed he had found the ones he was in search of, but found them dead.

There was the camp, the evidence of a bitter struggle for life there, among fallen trees and bowlders.

As the scouts approached a large band of coyotes went whining away, while buzzards and crows flew to distant trees, the latter showing their displeasure at being driven from their feast by hoarse cries.

Horses lay about here and there dead, but stripped of saddles, bridles or packs, according to whether they were riding-horses or pack-animals, and in a line beyond, where a charge had been made, over a score of Indian ponies were stretched out over the plain for a mile or more, but these too had been stripped of their trappings.

A broken rifle of ancient manufacture, a bowie with the blade shattered, bows, lances, arrows and other weapons of Indian warfare were scattered about in confusion.

But this was not the worst that the scouts gazed upon, for there were the bodies of seven men upon the field, huddled in a little inclosure where they had made a temporary fort to defend their lives.

Here too was a shattered rifle-butt, a broken bit, a torn blanket and other things that could only have belonged to the pale-face party.

The bodies lay within a space of half an acre in size, and they were so torn by the teeth of the wolves and beaks of the buzzards as to be wholly unrecognizable.

They had been stripped of their clothing, and were simply torn to pieces.

"There were seven in Lord Mildmay's party, and here are seven bodies, while each one has been scalped, that is evident."

"See this long lock of gray hair—it came from the head of poor Old Harry, and is stained with blood."

"Yes, pards, they were overwhelmed by numbers, and were wiped out entirely."

"This is a pitiful story to tell, a sad report to go back to England."

"But this time the red-skins have struck too big game and Lord Mildmay will be avenged fearfully."

So said the scout as he sat upon his horse gazing sadly upon the scene that met his vision.

The scouts were silent, and like their chief, sat with uncovered heads, looking upon the scene, their faces pale and stern.

"Yonder we will camp, pards, and one of you must stand guard over these bodies, that they be not more mutilated than they are."

"A few fires built around will keep the coyotes off to-night, I guess."

"And show the red-skins our camp, I fear, sir," said a scout.

"No danger of that, for red-skins seldom return to a scene like this, and the condition of the bodies shows that they have been dead for several days, three at least."

"We will camp here, bury the dead, and await the coming of Lieutenant Ames and the others, for our mission is ended."

"To-morrow I will take the trail of the Indians, and track them to their village, and Lieutenant Ames can send to the fort the report and ask for a force with which to pursue and punish the red-skins, for it must follow this deed and be quick and merciless to make a lesson of it that they will not forget."

The scout led the way to the camping-place, the horses were staked out, fires built round the fatal camp, and then preparations begun for supper.

After the meal a scout sentinel went on duty, to guard the bodies, while the others slept.

At midnight the guard quietly came and awakened one of his comrades, who came and took his place as sentinel, the other turning in for rest.

When morning came the sentinel aroused the little camp, breakfast was cooked and the men all adjourned to the camp of the dead and began the sad task of digging graves in which to place the remains.

Buffalo Bill did not work at grave-digging, but went over the field quietly, and from body to body.

At length he came up to the others at a quick step and cried:

"Pards, I have made a discovery!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CALLING THE DEATH-ROLL.

THE face of the chief of scouts showed that the discovery he had made was an important one.

It was seldom that so much excitement was revealed in his stern, handsome face.

All looked up at his words, and ceased in their work of digging the large grave, with bowie-knife and hatchet, and using a tin canteen split in two for a scoop.

The scout's men knew that he had indeed made a discovery.

"Pards, I shirked work at the graves this morning to look about me, for somehow matters did not look the same in the broad glare of day to me that they did in the dusk of evening."

"Now, Gerard, look well at that first body in the line there and tell me just what you think of it?"

The bodies had been brought and placed in a line not far from the grave, and Gerard at once walked toward the one indicated and gazed fixedly at it for awhile.

Then he said:

"This was one of Old Harry's men, sir."

"Well?"

"He was a Mexican, I take it."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that, as that small space of skin, his size and hair indicate."

"Now, Frank, what of the next body?"

The scout addressed gazed fixedly at the second body in line and said:

"If he hain't a Injun I'll eat my hat."

"You are right; his teeth, the shape of his head and face, with his form show that, torn up as he is by coyotes and buzzards."

Then Buffalo Bill called to the third scout and said:

"Now, Bony, your opinion of the third body?"

Bony turned the body over and over, seemingly not a bit troubled at touching it, and said after a very close examination:

"A white man, sir."

"Such was my opinion, and I agree with Frank and Gerard about the others."

"Now, Ernest, try the next."

"I've had my eye on him, sir, all the while and if he hain't a Injun, I'm not a white man."

"He is an Indian, Ernest, sure."

"Now, pards, there is Number Five in line."

"Another red-skin," was the opinion of Frank the scout.

"Sure," added Gerard.

"Red meat, certain," Ernest joined in, while Bony ended with:

"Pards, Injun it was born, Injun it died."

"Now Number Six."

"It hain't Old Harry, chief."

"Not a bit of it."

"Nor pale-face even."

"Red-skin"

And so continued the criticisms until all were convinced that the sixth man was certainly not Old Harry, but an Indian.

"Now this is the body supposed to be that of Lord Mildmay."

"Take a close look at it, pards," said Buffalo Bill.

"You said, chief, the Britisher was a big man?"

"Yes, Gerard, weighed about two hundred."

"This was a big man."

"Yes, and Lord Mildmay was six-foot tall."

"So is this man, sir."

"Well, this is a white man," said Frank.

"Oh yes, and about the best fraud that they tried to perpetrate upon us."

The four scouts looked at their chief for an explanation.

They saw that he had hit upon some idea that had not come to them.

"The body has been badly mutilated, pards, as you see, and a part of the mutilation was done with *knives*, as you can also see, for it was done to disguise the body, fearing that the coyotes and buzzards might remove all traces that it was not Lord Mildmay."

"You don't think it is the Englishman then, chief?"

"I *know* that it is not, for here are his feet, and what remains of them shows that they were very small, while Lord Mildmay had large-sized feet, as I distinctly remember, and broad shoulders—these are narrow."

"Then you think, sir, that Lord Mildmay was not killed?" asked Bony.

After a moment of thought Buffalo Bill replied:

"My opinion is just this, pards."

"The Mildmay party were attacked at this place, and without doubt captured, while some of them may have been killed."

"Old Harry brought white men with him, not Indians, and yet these bodies have been placed here to represent the Mildmay party."

"There are some things that show they were here, as that is the butt of a gun Lord Mildmay showed me, and the broken bowie-knife belonged to Old Harry, as I well know."

"Now Indians were the attacking force here, but I am sure that they were led by renegade whites, who left traces to show that only Indians were concerned."

"And the Mildmay party, chief?"

"Are either prisoners, or dead; the latter I believe, and more, there has been treachery somewhere beyond all doubt," responded Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PLOT UNFOLDED.

THE words of the chief of scouts set the four men to thinking, and the more they coned over the matter the more certain they became that Buffalo Bill had struck the keynote of the situation.

They at once began to look over the whole affair, judged from his standpoint, and it came upon them in many ways that the death camp had been "fixed," or as Frank said, "doctored" to cause a belief that the Mildmay party had been attacked by Indians and wiped out.

A closer inspection of the bodies proved that in each case the hair had been cut away, not eaten by coyotes, and this same doctoring with knives was shown in each case, while the positions being examined, all tended to reveal work that had been artificial, not the result of being killed in battle.

A horse, which Old Harry had shown Buffalo Bill at the little town, and said belonged to Lord Mildmay, was recognized among the dead animals by the scout, and a blood-stained handkerchief, tied in a knot as though bound about a wound in the head, was picked up near and it bore the crest the of English nobleman.

The men having scattered, going singly in their search, came together again at the unfinished grave just at noon.

The chief was there and each one of them gave the result of their searching and thinking over the matter in the light let upon it by Buffalo Bill.

To a man they agreed that Buffalo Bill was right and they so told him, giving all their reasons for so doing.

"Well, pards, I thought when you looked more closely into the matter you would decide as I have; but we will now bury these dead bodies, and make a camp at another point."

"To await the lieutenant's coming, sir?"

"Well, no, for he is about where I wish him, I think, and one of you must return to Fort Maroni and ask him to remain there until I can give him further information."

"I will go, sir," said Frank.

"All right, start in the morning and you will head him off before he gets far from the fort."

"You have formed your opinion about this matter, sir, I can see, so what shall I tell the lieutenant?" Frank said.

"Tell him simply that we came upon a camp of seven dead men and a number of horses, so fixed as to attempt to make us believe that it was the Mildmay party."

"But we are convinced that it is not Lord Mildmay's party, and we take the trail of the red-skins, when you start to join him, so as to follow them to their village."

"When I have done so, I will report to him, for him either to come on with the force at Maroni, or send to the fort for a large number of troops, as may be deemed best after we know the situation."

"You may also tell him that Indians attacked the party, but I am sure are under renegade leaders, and they were taken prisoners for some purpose yet to be revealed to us, and when we discover why they were captured, instead of being killed, we may solve the secret of the fate of the parties who have before so mysteriously disappeared on their gold-hunting expeditions to the Colorado River country."

"I will tell him just what you say, chief," answered Frank, and this being decided upon they set to work to bury the dead, Buffalo Bill excepted, for he started off on a circle of the camp to find the trail of the Indians after they had made the attack.

The afternoon passed just as he had picked up the several trails and come to the conclusion that the Indians had departed from the scene divided into a score of separate bands. Buffalo Bill then returned to camp, where the scouts, having completed their ghastly work, had assembled and were preparing supper.

"Did you find anything of importance, chief?" asked Frank.

"Yes, the red-skins left here in a score of different bands."

"Then that throws us off the scent?"

"Oh no."

"We can only trail four of them with Frank gone to Fort Maroni," said the guard.

"We need only follow one, pards, for, as in olden times it was said all roads lead to Rome, so do all those trails lead to a certain point and come together there."

"I guess you are right, chief, and you certainly have a way of looking through and through anything; they just divided to throw off any pursuit."

"Hoping to put us at fault."

"But they did not expect Buffalo Bill would be on their trail," said Frank with genuine admiration for his chief.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GRAVE-MARKED TRAIL.

BRIGHT and early the scouts were ready for the saddle.

The horses were entirely rested by their two nights' and a day's rest, and were ready to go on the trail.

Frank bade his comrades good-by, and started back for Fort Maroni, when he had seen that Buffalo Bill had decided to take the center trail of the numerous ones diverging from the fatal camp.

Having made this decision the chief set the pace for the day, and they pushed on at a steady trot that would carry them half a hundred miles by night.

They found the tracks of seventeen horses

in the trail they were following, or to be more exact, of five horses with shoes on their hoofs, and twelve unshod Indian ponies.

After a ride of five hours they came to a camp.

The skill of the scouts in reading signs showed them that it had been a night-camp, and that the Indians had begun their retreat from the scene of the fight in the middle of the day, and halted there when darkness overtook them.

A good spring was there, in the side of a cliff, plenty of grass along its course, and there was timber for fires, so they were glad to find a comfortable camping-place.

While his men looked to the horses and getting dinner, Buffalo Bill took advantage of the delay to examine all tracks about the camp.

"Ah! if that is not the track of Lord Mildmay, it was made by the boot that he wore, for it was English built, and had a steel horseshoe on the heel, with tacks in the sole of it."

"Either he came to this spring for water, or some man did who wore his boots."

"Yes, and there is Old Harry's track, too, either made by him or a man in his shoes, for I know his track well, having followed it many a long mile when hunting for the old man."

"Well, luck caused us to take the trail that the prisoners were on, for prisoners they are I am certain."

"There were seven in the party, and there are the tracks of five shod horses along here on this trail, and so five of the party may have been brought this way."

"I don't understand it exactly, why they were captured and not killed, but I guess we will get to the answer of the puzzle before the trail comes to an end," and thus musing Buffalo Bill continued his search until he was called to dinner, when he made known to his comrades what he had discovered.

Before leaving they all acquainted themselves with the tracks, and a closer search showed other footprints, several wearing high-heeled boots, and the rest the imprint of moccasins.

Pushing on once more, and reading every sign that they could discover, the scouts came to the conclusion that those they followed were about four days in advance of them.

They came to the next halting-place of the pursued, and which had been their noon-day camp, while the sun was yet a couple of hours' high, and this proved that they, the scouts, were traveling considerably faster than had those they were trailing.

They kept on until nightfall, and hit upon a fair camping-place, but were up in time to have breakfast and be ready to start as soon as it was light enough to see the trail.

An hour after leaving they came to the third camp of the Indians, and this being also a night camp, the scout dismounted and made a thorough search, again discovering the tracks of those they supposed to be the white captives.

Here, too, a grave was found, some distance from the camp, and by accident, through one of the horses getting loose and running away.

At once Gerard, who found it, called to the chief, and the grave was quickly opened.

In it were discovered the bodies of two Navaho Indians.

"Yes, they brought their dead and wounded with them, and each party will bury the dead after making a second camp on their trail home."

"We will find other graves by looking for them, pards," said Buffalo Bill.

Mounting once more they again pushed on, and so it continued for two days, finding the camps of those they followed, and invariably at the night-halts a grave or two.

The tracks also of the pale-face prisoners were also seen at each camping-place, and Buffalo Bill felt more and more certain that when the retreat of the red-skins was found there would Lord Mildmay, Old Harry and some of their companions be also.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT APPARITION.

THE trail of the retreating Indians had led the scouts in a northwestern direction, and

on a line that would bring them to the Colorado River near Lee's Ferry.*

Buffalo Bill was aware that the country to the west was wild, and it was said even uninhabited by Indians, and it bordered the grand and picturesque canyons of the Colorado.

Beyond the river were the Kaibol Mountains, also unknown, yet where a tribe of Indians were said to dwell.

To the westward, not as far away from his position then, as it was at the Fatal Camp, lay Fort Maroni, the white tops of the San Francisco Mountains being visible far in the distance.†

With these peaks in view it would be an easy thing to send a scout to Maroni for Lieutenant Ames, if need came for it.

So far there had not been an Indian seen, save those in the graves along the trail, or any fresh trails left by them.

The nature of the country was against their roving, as only here and there was it watered and wooded, and a blade of grass could be found, for this rendered traveling a hardship and game very scarce, and scalps or game was what the red-skin wanted on his prowling expeditions.

The night camp was made up a canyon, at a point somewhat well known to-day as the Navaho Spring, a stream so copious that it caused quite a little brook to come flowing down to the plains where it lost itself in the sands.

Beneath the shadows of red cliffs thousands of feet in height, the scouts went into camp just where those they pursued had made their encampment, and a glance about them revealed that there had been a large encampment there.

"The other trails meet here, chief," said Bony, as his eyes fell upon several trails leading to that point.

"Yes a few of them, and we will find others at Lee's Ferry, I expect all of those that do not center here."

"It was just as I supposed, they divided to throw pursuers off and put them at fault, and this was their rendezvous I suppose, this and the ferry across the Colorado," answered Buffalo Bill.

Here, as in the other camps, the same tracks were seen, and up in the canyon a few hundred yards new-made graves were found.

As in the other cases, that they might know just what the graves contained, the scouts threw out the soft earth.

They found here half a dozen bodies, and all were Indians.

"Well, pards, from the dead they buried the Mildmay party made a killing fight of it, and did splendidly."

"They did indeed, for these make eleven bodies we have found, not to speak of the seven they tried to play on us as Lord Mildmay and his men," Gerard responded.

"And there are more trails that have graves along them too, which we have missed—yes, Lord Mildmay and his men rendered a good account of themselves, though I can not yet see an explanation for their having been taken alive."

"Yes, chief, I only wish they have been, for then we have a chance to rescue them; but we have seen only dead Navahoes, and if they have taken the prisoners up into their country it will be a miracle if we get them out."

"It will not be play, to do so, Ernest! but we can let the horses go loose to-night, as they cannot go far, or get away, and I do not think a watch is necessary, as we will sleep back up the canyon a short distance, so we can all get a good night's rest."

The scouts were more than willing for this arrangement, and smoked their pipes after supper, wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down to sleep.

What caused Buffalo Bill to awake he never knew, for there was no sound he was certain, and he seemed to feel that there was a presence near him, a presence other than that of his comrades.

* Lee's Ferry on the Colorado Grande, was the retreat of Major John D. Lee, the Mormon Danite, who was executed by the Government for the part he took in the Mountain Meadow Massacre.

—THE AUTHOR.

† It is no uncommon thing in that country for the human eye to readily see two hundred miles.

—THE AUTHOR.

He rose to a sitting posture on his blanket, and gazed about him.

It was bright starlight, and he could readily see the towering cliffs, the shadows in the canyon, the willow trees fringing the banks of the little stream, and his comrades lying near.

He heard a snort and then another, as though the horses just above had been startled, and ere he could divine the cause, which he attributed to a mountain lion, there glided past him a horseman form, going like the wind.

He raised his rifle but before he could use it, it was gone.

But he had recognized the apparition of old Fort Maroni—the *Skeleton Scout*.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RED WARNING.

"PARDS, awake!"

There was something in the tones of Buffalo Bill's voice that brought the three scouts to their feet at once.

"What is it, chief?" they asked, and each man grasped his rifle ready for instant use.

"Pards, I just saw the Skeleton Scout again."

Not a man doubted the assertion.

But all were silent.

They looked about them in an awed kind of way and then at their chief.

He waited an instant and then continued:

"What awakened me I do not know, but I felt some one was near."

"I arose to a sitting posture and then heard one horse, then another, snort, as though in alarm."

"It was not a dream, chief?"

"No, Bony, I was as wide awake then as I am now."

"It frightened the horses then?"

"I supposed it was a mountain lion up the canyon, and the horses had huddled near us, as you see."

"But suddenly there glided by me a form, and it went at great speed."

"I stooped for my rifle, and yet before I could raise it, the man had disappeared."

"You saw him?"

"Oh, yes."

"How far off was he, chief, from you?"

"Do you see that trail up the canyon?"

"Yes, chief, I was sleeping across it, so that none of the horses could stray by us."

"It is not ten feet from my blankets here?"

"No, chief."

"Well, the apparition passed along that trail and leaped over you, Bony."

"Oh, Lord! that settles me," and the scout seemed to feel a mysterious dread of evil befalling him.

"No more than it does me, and the rest of us, Bony."

"What kind of a looking object was it, chief?"

"It was the Skeleton Scout."

"Lordy! the one you saw at Fort Maroni?"

"Yes, for I saw his white skeleton form distinctly."

"Then the lieutenant and Lasso Lil did not capture him as they said they would do, to show us when we meet again?"

"It would seem not, Gerard, unless there are several of these Skeleton Scouts, for I saw the same object I did that night at Fort Maroni, and the horses saw it too and were frightened."

"What can we do about it, chief?"

"Nothing to-night, but we will give a thorough hunt in the canyon in the morning, for you know it ends in the cliffs half-a-mile back from the plains."

"Shall we stand guard, chief?"

"Oh, no, for the Skeleton Scout if alone is not dangerous, and I think coming upon us was a surprise to him as well as to me, to judge from the manner in which he sped away when he reached our camp."

"I only hope he will stay away," growled Gerard.

"Or come within reach of my lasso, for there is one I wish to catch alive."

"A ghost, chief?"

"Yes, Ernest, ghost or goblin, whoever or whatever it may be that is masquerading in a skeleton form," answered the chief in his determined way when much moved.

The scouts returned to their blankets

again, but, excepting Buffalo Bill, none of them returned to sleep immediately.

He, however, dropped off without a moment's delay, and noting the fact the others followed his example.

The day came without further disturbance, and the scouts were glad to have the darkness gone after the visit of the weird being of the night before.

Going down to the mouth of the canyon to look out over the plain, Buffalo Bill saw, many miles away, a long line of fog-bank, or cloud of mist hanging over the mighty chasm that marked the course of the Colorado River, which flowed along in its bed a thousand and more feet below.

Not a thing was visible upon the desert plain as far as the eyes could reach, or on the brighter plateau far beyond running back to a solid wall of carmine cliffs a couple of thousand feet in height.

Wrapped in amazement and admiration at the scene, Buffalo Bill only glanced downward as he turned to retrace his way up the canyon to breakfast.

He started, as he beheld written on a large flat rock that the trail crossed, and almost at his very feet, in bold characters, and in bright red letters as follows:

"A warning from the Dead to the Living—"

"Go back, for this trail leads to the Land of Death!"

Buffalo Bill quickly gave his signal, known so well to his men, and in a couple of minutes they stood at his side ready for deadly work if need be.

He silently pointed to the red warning.

They read it with wide-eyed wonder, and then Bony asked in almost a whisper:

"Will you heed it, chief?"

"For you, my pard, yes, but for myself, no, for I continue on this trail," was the determined reply of Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNHEEDED.

THE men were surprised at the response of their chief, and Bony said, quickly:

"You don't mean to say that you think we would desert you for that writing there on the rocks, chief, even if it was written in blood, and with a skeleton finger?"

"No, indeed, we don't turn back for warnings, come from whom they may."

"We hain't lived hand-in-hand with death, chief, to be scared at a skeleton."

Buffalo Bill smiled at the earnest responses of his three brave comrades, and answered:

"No, indeed, pard, I know you too well to believe you would desert me if certain death stared you in the face; but come, let us return and have breakfast, and then I will tell you what I mean."

They went back to camp, ate breakfast, and when their pipes were lighted all round, Buffalo Bill said:

"Pards, you remember, when we came around the bend in these cliffs, some miles back, and glanced afar off to our left, that we saw the white peaks of San Francisco Mountains?"

All nodded in the affirmative, and the chief of scouts continued:

"At the base of the tallest peak, just beyond on the other side, is the level plain, in the center of which stands old Fort Maroni."

"Now I wish you three to go back to the bend in the cliffs, and from there branch out by separate trails, of your own choosing, for Fort Maroni."

"Go at a steady pace, not out of a walk, pick your best way, keep an estimate of distance and the difficulties of travel, and when you reach the fort compare notes."

"The one who has traveled the best trail, and made the quickest time, will be the one to guide Lieutenant Ames and the corporal and four soldiers, with Lasso Lil and four scouts back to this point."

"This will give a force of twelve of us, all told, including myself and the one who guides the party back here, and leave eight men still at the fort, upon which we can retreat if we have to do so."

* Once the stronghold of Brigham Young, now the home ranch of a cattle company, composed of wealthy New Yorkers, of whom Mr. William Dowd is one.

—THE AUTHOR.

"And you, chief?" asked Bony, who had listened with the others most attentively.

"I will have you take my horse back with you, but bring me another one upon your return, for I must be supposed to have retreated with you."

"If I am on foot I can readily keep hidden, and my desire is to discover just who the Skeleton Scout is, and going on to Lee's Ferry find out if all those trails starting from the scene of the fight, met there and whither they go."

"I can do this, for I am a good walker, and get back here to meet you; but should I be delayed, just wait for me as long as Lieutenant Ames deems it best to do so, and if alive and free I will put in an appearance in time."

"Then you will not heed the warning, chief?"

"Oh, no, Gerard, I will let it pass unheeded, for I am sure I can do much better service by doing so, and alone and on foot I have nothing to fear, especially as any one who may now know of our presence here, will see the tracks of your horses and mine returning, and thus conclude that the warning has been heeded."

"I don't know but what you are right, chief, but I hate to leave yer here all alone."

"It will certainly be safe for me, if you put the lonely phase upon it, pard, for where I might have to desert a horse, not being able to hide him, I could readily conceal myself."

"That's so, chief."

"If that Skeleton Scout last night had been mounted he would never have gotten away from me, for I could have dropped his horse before he got out of sight."

"They say he goes mounted, too, chief."

"So I have heard," Buffalo Bill said, with a smile.

"Is his horse a skeleton steed, I wonder?" asked Bony, with a laugh.

"So they say."

"I wonder what interest he can have in hanging about trails and warning folks not to get killed?"

"I don't know, but he seems not to like the country he has gone to and so warns other emigrants away from the Land of Death; but I hope to get close enough to him to find enough out about him to be able to write his obituary," and then Buffalo Bill added:

"Now, pard, you must be off, so leave me provisions enough to last me a couple of weeks, as you are going right back to the fort where you can get more."

The provisions were quickly divided into four parts, the chief being given the lion's share, as he was to remain, and then the scouts all mounted and rode away on the back trail.

Arriving at the bend in the cliffs, where they were to part, Buffalo Bill dismounted, threw the stake line of his horse to Ernest, grasped the hand of each in farewell, and went back among the cliff canyons to start upon his lonely reconnaissance, and effort to find the Skeleton Scout.

CHAPTER XXX.

LEFT ALONE.

BUFFALO BILL obtained a commanding position among the red cliffs and watched his men start upon their separate trails to the old Mormon stronghold.

He saw Bony branch off after going a quarter of a mile with the others, and soon after Ernest turned to the left, the horse of the chief trotting along behind him.

Gerard held straight on, with a wave of his hand to his two comrades, for Bony was still in sight.

Watching them as they grew smaller and smaller by distance, Buffalo Bill held the three in sight long after they were lost to view to each other.

"There go three splendid, faithful fellows, true as steel and without an atom of fear in their make-up."

"From my idea of the lay of the country, I think that Bony will make the shortest trail, for he will avoid having to go around some of those volcanic mountains that lie between here and Fort Maroni."

"Well, they are cared for, so now to look after myself."

"I have rather a larger load, with my provisions, extra ammunition and blankets, than

I care to carry, but I must not mind that, as I will need all before my lone scout is over, I take it.

"Well, I shall reconnoiter the country thoroughly with my glass, and make my way back to the Navaho Spring to camp to-night.

"If the Skeleton Scout does not put in appearance to-night, I will tramp to-morrow into the country beyond Lee's Ferry, or hold vigil there, being guided by circumstances as to just what to do."

So saying Buffalo Bill leveled his field-glasses at each of the retreating forms of the scouts, seeing first one then the other disappear from sight.

Then he carefully swept the whole country in view with the glasses, and tried to find some living being or creature, but in vain.

Not even a coyote was in view.

Then he glanced up the trail he must follow along the cliffs to the camp of the night before, and decided to at once make his way there along the summit of the cliffs, trusting to finding a way to descend into the canyon when he got to the point overhanging the springs.

It was a hard and perilous climb, up the face of a cliff a thousand feet high, but the scout had an iron nerve, a cool head and was inured to hard work.

He picked his way carefully, carrying his pack, rifle and belt of arms strapped to his back, and after several hours of hard climbing reached the summit.

The view was a grand one, but he surveyed it from a place of hiding, for he knew not but that some keen eye might discover him.

He was up among the clouds, up where the eagles made their home.

The expanse of his view was a vast one, and carefully searching the trail with his glasses, he at last caught sight of a mere speck moving a long way off.

"It is Bony, and he is twenty miles away," muttered the scout.

The other scouts he was unable to find, but knew Bony from the trail he had taken.

Going back from the edge of the cliffs he sat down to have a cold dinner, and then went on his way up toward Navahoe Springs.

He could see the enormous chasm that outlined the Colorado River's course, and yet in all the vast outlook, only an eagle was seen now and then.

The solitude was oppressive and the scout found relief in movement.

As he neared the springs, or the deep canyon whence they flowed, he came upon the ruins of a departed race, or a race fast fading away.

They were the homes in the long ago of the Moqui Indians, who were wont to build upon the heights of lofty cliffs to prevent an attack from their foes.

The scout stood amid the ruins of the rock and adobe huts and pondered upon the time when busy life filled the rude streets, young braves descended to the plains to hunt, and maidens carried jugs of water upon their heads up the long, steep and zig-zag trail from the springs to their homes.

Feeling that he must be getting down into the canyon, near the springs, to camp there before nightfall, Buffalo Bill was about to begin the descent, when suddenly half a dozen mountain sheep came bounding along over the rocks.

The temptation was too great to resist and a shot brought down a fine young animal.

Delaying to cut some choice bits of meat, Buffalo Bill did not reach the spring in the head of the canyon until the shadows began to grow black, and he started as he beheld a human form standing before him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SCOUT'S CAPTIVE.

"Ha! you are Buffalo Bill!

"Up with your hands!"

Such was the greeting that Buffalo Bill heard when he came upon the form he beheld standing at the upper spring in the canyon, just where he had intended to make his camp.

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill, and under the circumstances I obey you," and the scout raised his hands above his head.

He was caught at a disadvantage, for his

belt of arms and rifle were strapped to the pack and roll of blankets on his back.

The one who had thus caught Buffalo Bill at a vantage, was a man clad in border garb, with a rifle lying on the ground at his feet, and a revolver leveled in his hand.

He was a large man, deeply bronzed by exposure, and wore a full beard and his hair long.

"So I have caught you, have I, Buffalo Bill?" he said with something like a sneer.

"Not knowing otherwise it looks so to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Hold, Bony, don't kill him!"

The scout uttered the words as with a quick warning to some one standing behind his captor, and the man, with a startled exclamation, turned suddenly.

The act was fatal to his safety, for with the bound of a panther Buffalo Bill had sprung forward, a kick on the arm sent the revolver flying in the air, and his grip was upon the throat of his enemy.

Taken completely by surprise, in spite of his great strength, the man had more than met his match and was borne to the ground backward, while, reaching his disengaged hand up to his pack, Buffalo Bill drew his bowie-knife and commanded:

"Struggle and you are a dead man.

"I mean what I say."

The man's arms relaxed and he was quiet, and the scout instantly disarmed him by taking off his belt, and with a lariat that he never went without, bound the arms and feet of his prisoner securely.

The man looked pallid and anxious.

He had been beaten at his own game.

The tables had been turned upon him completely.

The shadows were still deepening and in a quarter of an hour more daylight would be gone, so the scout was anxious to be settled in camp before darkness came.

So he said:

"Well, pard, where is your camp?"

"I have none," was the gruff reply.

"Walking or riding?"

"I came on foot."

"May I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?"

"What?"

"Introduce yourself to me, please."

"You don't know me."

"You have the advantage, for you called me by name."

"I know you."

"Perhaps when I see your face in a better light I may recall you."

"No you won't."

"We shall see; but now tell me your name."

"My name is Gabe Gurney."

"Well, Mr. Gurney, you say that you are alone?"

"Yes."

"This is a lonely country to travel alone in."

"May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Prospecting."

"Found anything?"

"No."

"So you are a miner?"

"Yes."

"Any other calling?"

"No."

"I thought you had."

"Why?"

"Because you sought to rob me."

"I didn't."

"Why hold me up as you did?"

"For self-protection."

"Knowing me you knew that no honest man has anything to fear from Buffalo Bill."

"Well, a man has to be on the safe side."

"That's why you are now my prisoner, instead of having it the other way."

"But come: are you alone? where is your camp? and are you on foot? for I wish these questions answered, as if I catch you at any trickery it will go hard with you, and the appearance of any of your pards will be a signal for your death, so I can attend to them."

The scout spoke in a tone that the prisoner saw was not trifling and he answered:

"I am alone, and my horse and camp are down the canyon, for I came up here hoping to get a shot at some game, when I saw you coming and waited for you."

"When did you camp there?"

"An hour ago."

"Where is your retreat?"

"What do you mean?"

"See here, you may be here alone, but you have comrades at some retreat, I am sure."

"No, I am alone."

"How do you live?"

"On game."

"Well, I'll make you safe while I go down to have a look at your camp."

"You are trying to deceive me, and if I catch you leading me into a trap you will be camping right in the canyon where Gabriel blows his trumpet for saints and sinners to answer roll-call, and you'll have to break ground to get out."

"Now, pard, I'll tie you until my return," and binding his prisoner to a tree, Buffalo Bill went on down the canyon.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PRISONER-GUIDE.

BUFFALO BILL not only secured his prisoner well, but he also gagged him so that he could not call out and give warning did he have help near.

The man rebelled at the treatment but the scout reminded him pleasantly that it was only a difference of who was captor and who captive.

"If you had had anything to gain by my death, my toes would now be turned up to the daisies, pard," he said as he walked away.

He did not leave his pack, for he did not know but that circumstances might prevent his return and he wished to be ready for any emergency that might arise.

Down the canyon went the scout, using the greatest caution.

It was not long before he came to a horse staked out and grazing with evident relish upon the rich grass that grew near the springs in the canyon.

He passed the animal and was glad to see that there was but one, for this helped out the prisoner's assertion that he was alone.

Near the lower spring, by the last glimmer of daylight he beheld a saddle, bridle and pack.

He walked all about and even went to the mouth of the canyon but found nothing more.

Then he retraced his way, bridled and saddled the horse, took up the pack and rode a quarter of a mile further to the larger spring at the head of the canyon. He found his prisoner as he had left him, and having staked the horse out again, gathered some wood from the willows about, and soon had a fire burning in the crevice of the rocks, where it could not be seen by any one coming into the canyon below.

He arranged the traps about the fire and then brought his prisoner there to await while he prepared supper, removing the gag from his mouth and unbinding his hands, though leaving his feet securely tied together so that escape was impossible.

The man watched his movements eagerly, saw him open his own provision bag, and then the one he had, and with a glance at what was in the latter he asked:

"You say you are alone here, and have no headquarter camp?"

"Yes."

"You have no oven or skillet with you, and yet here is bread baked in an oven, and this deer-steak was fried in a fryingpan, yet you have none with you."

"Then you have a couple of days provisions, even some baked potatoes and a raw onion, and I do not know of a garden within three hundred miles of here."

"Pard, you have lied to me and I am somewhat rough on liars."

The prisoner made no reply, and while getting supper Buffalo Bill continued:

"May I ask where you got the saddle and bridle you ride?"

"I traded with an Indian for them."

"What kind of an Indian?"

"I don't know, but I think he was a Piute."

"Well, it may have been, but was doubtless a Navaho; but in either case if you traded with an Indian you are friendly with them, and that means you are a renegade, and that is a bad position for a white man to find himself in."

"I am no renegade," growled the man.

"May I ask when you made this trade?"

"A long time ago."

"Indeed! and yet I saw that saddle and bridle in a store in a New Mexico town a little over two weeks ago, and selected it for a friend of mine to ride on a jaunt he intended to make—yes, and I notice blood upon it too, and you have a fine English shawl among your traps, one that I also recognize as having belonged to my friend."

"I guess, my friend, you will have to make a clean breast of it, to save that neck of yours from a hemp cravat; but come, supper is ready, and as you intend to ease your conscience by a confession, eat freely."

The scout placed a well-filled plate before the man, some of the mountain sheep nicely broiled, a roasted potato, raw onion, some bread, coffee and bacon, and in spite of his dangerous situation he ate heartily.

Perhaps it was because he had fully realized his desperate position and had come to the conclusion to make a clean breast of it.

The scout ate heartily also, for he felt that he had already done a good work in capturing a prisoner who would prove most valuable to him.

When supper was over, and the things put away, in case a move in the night was necessary, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, pard, I know that you are one of the gang of renegades that led the Indians against Lord Mildmay and his party, and I expect you to guide me to the retreat where they are, and to make a clean breast of it all."

"If you do so, then you save your neck; but if you refuse to be my guide, then you shall go back with me on the trail, to my band of scouts, and I will turn you over to them as a white renegade."

"You know what the result will be, so decide."

"I will be your guide in return for my life," was the quick response.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CAPTIVE'S STORY.

BUFFALO BILL kept his eye fixed upon the face of his prisoner.

Every movement of the face, every twitch of a muscle, and the slightest expression that flitted over it, he read carefully, to note just what it meant.

The prisoner had eagerly accepted his offer of terms.

But was it in good faith, with a desire to get out of a bad scrape by the sacrifice of others, or was it to secure favors, gain the confidence of the scout, and thus lead him into a trap?

For such a contingency Buffalo Bill must be prepared.

"Well, pard, what have you to sell?" he asked, quietly.

"What do you wish to buy?" was the answer, in the same strain.

"All the information you have, and which will lead to the recapture of my friends, if they are alive, and the punishment of the guilty."

"What have you to offer?"

"Your life."

"Only that?"

"Do you hold it so cheap, then?"

"I want gold, also."

"You will not get one dollar, only your life, no more, no less, with certain death by bullet if tricky, or at the yard-arm, if you do not accept my offer."

"Now go ahead, for night is the time for sleep and day for action."

"Then let me sleep on it."

"No, indeed, you may have heart disease, and die in your sleep," was the laconic response.

"Fire away and I'll answer," was the response, with a sigh of the prisoner.

The scout had taken a seat where he was in shadow, while the flickering light of the fire fell upon the face of the man whose life was hanging by a thread.

"It is just this way, Gabe Gurney."

"You are in a country where white men seldom come, and then only to fight Indians, or on missions of importance, and they never are such fools as to come alone."

"You are here alone."

The scout winced at this shot, but replied without showing that it hit dead center:

"Before my men finish with you, you may wish that I had come alone."

"But let me tell you that where men have come here in search of gold they have always been in parties of half a dozen and more, and as a proof of the danger of the country, they have never been heard of after."

"Massacred by Indians is the verdict returned upon them, and so it will be said of some friends of mine who came here two weeks ago."

"But I am determined to know the whole truth about this Indian massacre business, and I am here for that purpose."

"I have got the key to unlocking the mystery—yourself—and I will know, or I will lose the key, so I give you a chance."

"Indians are the tools I have no doubt, but there are those behind the Indians, renegade white men—you see I am posted—and you can either tell me what you know or lose your life."

"You understand the situation exactly, Mr. Gurney."

"I told you I did long ago."

"Then shout the tune."

"What do you wish to know?"

"Is Lord Mildmay dead or alive?"

The man started at that direct question, but replied:

"He is alive."

"Good!"

"Now about Old Harry Haphazard?"

"He's all right."

"What force had Lord Mildmay with him?"

"There were seven."

"Where were they attacked?"

"At Rocky Spring Range."

"Who by?"

"Indians."

"Who else?"

"Only Indians."

"You are not telling the truth."

"Well, there were white men who instigated it."

"You being one?"

"No, I was not one in that work."

"Why not?"

"Well, I'll out with the truth."

"It will help you."

"I came here with others to hunt gold, as I told you, and I found the Navaho chief Pale-Face Killer—"

"I have heard much of him; but go on with your story."

"I found him wounded on the trail, while out prospecting, and I took him to camp and cared for him for some weeks, when he was able to return to his village."

"Yes."

"He had been treacherously shot and left for dead by a young chief, who was his rival and next in rank; but he went back and told his story and the one who shot him was put to death according to Indian law."

"This is an Indian story, not what I care to hear."

"I tell you this to show you that the chief and his people became my friends, and we were allowed to hunt for gold unmolested."

"How many of you?"

"There were seven of us."

"Continue."

"Well, to keep others out, some of the party urged the Indians to guard the trails, and to whip the pale-faces back, but I was not in favor of this."

"And so it was that parties have been attacked?"

"Yes."

"And Lord Mildmay also?"

"Yes."

"They made a good fight?"

"A splendid fight, for the Englishman and Old Harry fought like demons."

"I thought that you were not there."

"I was told so."

"And they were captured and carried to your retreat?"

"No, they were taken to the Indian village."

"Well, you will go with me and show me the direct trails to that village and aid me to rescue those men?"

"I'll do it, for I am no enemy of my own people," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNDER TREACHEROUS GUIDANCE.

"THERE is something else I would like to ask you, Gabe Gurney?" said Buffalo Bill, after he had pondered over the story told by the prisoner.

"Out with it, pard."

"Who is the Skeleton Scout?"

The eyes of Buffalo Bill were fixed piercingly upon the face of the man as he asked the question, and he noted the start given, the quick glance and falling of the eyes and the compressed lips.

But this was but temporary, for the question came immediately:

"The Skeleton Scout?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Have you never heard of him?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Never have."

"Do you mean that you have never heard of a person known as the Skeleton Scout?"

"It's what I mean."

"I do not believe it."

"Who is he?"

"A weird mass of bones that haunt the trails and warn people back from this country."

"Not a ghost?" and the man spoke in an awed whisper.

"Some men think so; but you do not believe in such things?"

"I won't say that, for I have seen strange sights since I came into this country."

"Such as—"

"Once I did not believe in ghosts, but I tell you, Mr. Cody, I do now."

"You seem to know me pretty well for one who is a stranger to me."

"I have heard that your name was Cody, and that men called you Buffalo Bill because—"

"We are discussing ghosts just now, Mr. Gabe Gurney, not W. F. Cody."

"You were telling me about this Skeleton Scout?"

"No, I was asking you to tell me about him."

"I don't know anything about such a thing as a Skeleton Scout, but I do believe that the dead walk the earth in spirit form."

"But this is in *body form*, Gurney."

"It's all the same, and I would not meet him for a great deal."

"Why?"

"I'd be sure it meant my death-knell."

"I have seen his Boneship several times, and I yet live."

"Where did you see him?"

"The last time in this very canyon last night."

"Oh Lord!" and the prisoner glanced about him with a look of terror.

"You act well, Gurney, but I am not to be deceived."

"I am not trying to deceive you."

"All right, I will give you another chance, for now it is time we turned in."

The chief then bound the hands of his prisoner securely, spread his blankets for him, made him lie down and covered him up.

He had put him next to the cliff, in a crevice, and lying down himself on the outer side, after he had made a search about the surroundings, he knew that he could not escape unless he freed himself and stepped over him without awaking him, two things impossible, the scout concluded, to be done.

Once or twice in the night a movement of his prisoner awoke the scout, and his hand quickly felt of his bonds, but found them secure.

The day dawned to find the man safe, and his hands and feet slightly swollen from being bound, so Buffalo Bill quickly untied him and made him bathe in the cool waters of the spring.

After breakfast Buffalo Bill led the horse up to the upper end of the canyon, and with fallen trees, which he cut with the hatchet he always carried, he made a barrier across the defile that would keep the animal secure in a pasture where there was water, and grass enough to last for weeks.

"Now, Gurney, we will start on our tramp, and I will of course let you go without any bonds upon you; but I warn you that I will kill you at the first attempt you make to escape, or to give an alarm if we run upon any of your pards, or Indian allies."

"I know when to keep my mouth shut; but I told you I would help you."

"All right, I'll trust you—within reach of my revolver."

"Your horse can take care of himself, for I do not intend to take him."

"I am not much of a walker."

"Yet a prospector; how do you reconcile the two statements?"

"Why not take the horse, for he could carry our packs and give us each a lift?"

"And betray us."

"No, this is a secret expedition, Gurney, and not to be advertised."

"I do not wish to kill your horse, or to turn him loose, so will leave him there penned up, hoping that he will not be found by any one while we are gone."

"Now start and lead the way."

The prisoner shouldered his pack, and with something very like a smothered oath set off on the trail down the canyon.

The canteens had been filled, food cooked for a cold dinner, and Buffalo Bill was ready for the trail, bring it what it might to him, under a guide whom he had not the slightest confidence in, beyond his own interest.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE COLORADO'S BANKS.

The trail led out of the canyon upon a barren plain that sloped gently to the chasm of the Colorado River, thirty miles away.

It ran along the mountain cliffs for miles and then gradually branched off around foothills and continued on a downward slope to the only crossing of the Colorado River in a distance of hundreds of miles.

Nearing the river the trail wound up the steep ridge of a cliff along a lofty ridge and then toward the stream, when, after a tramp of over thirty miles the river burst into view far below.

The scout forgot his fatigue in the grand view presented before him, and seeing that he was spellbound, the prisoner suddenly stepped backward a pace, then another and another until he was ten paces away.

He was just about to start away when the scout turned like lightning and his revolver was in his hand and leveled.

"One inch more, Gurney, and it will be your last move in life."

The man stopped short and called out:

"What's the matter, for I am not going to run away?"

"I am sure of that."

"I was only going to lie down yonder and rest."

"It came very near being your last rest."

The man shuddered at the words and tone of the scout, who continued:

"All along the trail to-day I have had to urge you on, I have carried your pack as well as my own, have helped you all I could, and yet you would have bounded away like a deer just now in an instant more, if I had not seen you."

"Now, sir, I'll keep a lasso about you."

"Don't tie me."

"I'll not hurt you, only have you within reach if I want you suddenly, and besides, I fear you may fall off these cliffs."

The scout then bound his lariat about the waist of his prisoner and slipped the loop end over his own shoulders.

Gazing again at the scene before him, he asked:

"How do we cross the river, for the trails on this side center there at yonder point I see."

"You will have to swim across, but I cannot swim."

"I can teach you in one lesson, and you will be delighted to know the art; but what smoke is that curling up yonder in that canyon on the other side?"

"An Indian camp, I guess."

The scout took out his field-glass and leveling it, said:

"I have heard that a white man by the name of Lee lives here."

"Do you know him?"

"I have seen him, and I guess if we signal him he will ferry us across."

"I guess we won't trouble him, for I see a boat on the other side, and to-night I will swim across and get it, for I can paddle you over quicker than I could teach you to swim, Gurney."

The scout marked the change in the man's

face, at his discovery of the smoke, and the canoe, but he simply said:

"Now we will go into hiding in some safe place until night, and then I will go after the boat."

The scout led the way and a spot was soon found away from the trails.

Binding his prisoner and gagging him once more, Buffalo Bill left him and went off to reconnoiter.

He closely examined the several trails leading to the ferry and decided that all those that had divided at the fatal camp, had met there at that point on the Colorado.

That they had crossed there was no doubt, and once beyond the river the redskins had doubtless hurried on to their village, with their captives, scalps and booty.

But where had the white renegades gone?

They certainly had not gone on with the Indians, when they were gold-hunting along the Colorado River.

Nor, had they, in the scout's mind, allowed the Indians to take their white prisoners.

They must have gone then to some retreat not far from that crossing, and perhaps upon the very side of the river where he then stood.

Buffalo Bill had heard of the ferryman of the Colorado, and no one knew how it was that he lived there at peace with the redskins, nor in fact anything about him.

Having decided on his course, the scout noted his surroundings, marked the spot where the boat was tied under some willows, measured with his eyes the river at that point and said:

"I'll come back after dark and make the swim, for it is not over a quarter of a mile, and the boat will carry all across in safety."

"Then I must find a camp for the night, and to-morrow that fellow must show me his retreat, or I'll leave him bound and hungry while I look for it myself."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

RETURNING to his prisoner, Buffalo Bill began to prepare supper, as soon as he had loosened the bonds on the man's hands and feet and removed the gag.

It was growing late and he was anxious to have supper over, return to the river and cross over to a night camp.

Gurney showed a willingness to talk, but the scout did not encourage him and sternly went on with his work.

After supper was over, the traps were packed up, and the prisoner's hands were tied behind him, while he was gagged as well, for the scout did not care to take any chances of his giving a call for help.

His feet were left free so that he could walk, and then Buffalo Bill led the way by the trail he had followed in the afternoon.

He reached the river-bank, at the same spot where he had stood and examined the other shore with his glass, and having placed his prisoner in a secure retreat, and seen that there was no chance of his escape, he went to the water's edge, threw aside his clothing and plunged in.

The water was icy cold, coming as it did from the mountains, and Buffalo Bill knew full well the danger of being seized with a cramp, or, losing his strength, being carried down into the rapids below.

But he was a bold and tireless swimmer, and he struck out with strong strokes for the other shore.

Above him on either side towered the mighty cliffs, and the solitude was broken only by the wash of the waters as they sped along, through their unrivaled banks.

Darkness and silence reigned supreme, and the scout felt all there was in that desolate solitude, that awe-inspiring river, its lofty banks above him and fathomless depths beneath him.

On, on he swam with the same vigorous stroke he had struck at leaving the bank, the middle of the river was reached, then the dark bank ahead grew more and more distinct, and after a quarter of an hour in the water he reached the other shore.

Clambering out upon the rocks he beheld the willows near at hand and beneath them was the boat tied to an overhanging branch.

He went out upon this and lowered himself into the boat, which he found to be a canoe, hewn out of a solid log.

There was a paddle in the canoe, and untying it he was on his way toward the other shore, for the first time in years he was wholly unarmed, his rifle and belt of arms being with his clothes upon the other bank.

Reaching the shore he made his canoe fast, resumed his clothes, and buckled on his arms with more real delight than he had ever felt in performing the same act before.

When he was once more armed he felt like another man and walked with a quick step to where he had left the prisoner.

There he found him, but he first carried the packs to the canoe and placed them in it.

Then he returned and unbinding the feet of the man bade him get up and follow him.

The prisoner obeyed, yet appeared to walk with difficulty and the scout aided him along.

Reaching the boat the prisoner said:

"Suppose that canoe capsizes?"

"But it will not."

"It might."

"Yes, it is possible but not probable."

"In that case, bound as I am I could not help myself."

"And would drown?"

"Exactly."

"I could save you, I think."

"You would have all you could do to take care of yourself in this river, for it is nearly half a mile wide here, and the stream is very swift and full of whirlpools."

"I swam across without difficulty."

"You swam across?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do so?"

"To get the canoe."

"Was it on the other side?"

"It was."

"That is strange."

"Never mind discussing it now, but get in for I wish to run you across."

"Unbind my hands so I can swim if we capsize."

"Ah! you swim then?" quickly said the scout.

"No, but I could struggle."

"I'll save you the trouble of a struggle."

"Come, into the canoe."

The prisoner obeyed, the scout followed and the canoe started across.

Again the scout sought for a good hiding-place, and finding it, led his prisoner there and bound and gagged him as he had done when leaving him alone before.

Then he returned for his traps from the canoe, and to place it where he had found it.

With the packs upon his shoulders he returned to the spot where he had left his captive, to stop suddenly at what he beheld.

There was a weird light there it seemed, and by its glare, instead of his prisoner, he beheld facing him, and with arms extended, the form of the Skeleton Scout.

The prisoner was not there.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRIO OF SCOUTS.

LEFT at Fort Maroni, in the midst of the Indian country, or rather in a country surrounded by hostiles, the position of Lieutenant Ames was not an enviable one.

He had but a small force with which to defend himself, though he had a strong position and could readily hide that he had not a much larger number of men under his command.

The trouble was that the young officer felt the tediousness of inaction, and the suspense, for while Buffalo Bill and his small party were on the trail in busy action he was there waiting and watching, and anxious regarding the fate of Lord Mildmay as well as of those who had gone to look him up.

Having failed, even under Lasso Lil's splendid guidance, to find any trail left by the Skeleton Scout about the little Mormon burying-ground, Lieutenant Ames returned to the stockade and at once went to work to put his position in the best possible condition for offense.

The horses were hobbled and allowed to feed by day out on the plain, where there was good grass and the brook near, and at night were staked out close around the barrier of the fort, into which they could be driven at a moment's notice.

There was a guard kept by day, and a scout whose duty it was to ride about a mile or more from the fort to reconnoiter.

At night three sentinels were on duty, and three more placed out upon the plain several hundred yards from the fort.

Thus prepared and guarded, Lieutenant Ames felt that he was not to be easily surprised, and he was sure that he could hold his position against any ordinary odds.

The first break came when Scout Frank came in with the report of the fight at the range and what had followed.

This braced the men to renewed watchfulness and care and all were anxiously awaiting further news from the chief of scouts.

Frank had arrived just as Lieutenant Ames was preparing to start out on the trail of Buffalo Bill, and had arranged for the rest of the force to follow.

Then came several days of waiting, and of suspense for the fate of the scout who had gone on the trail of the red-skins with only three men with him.

Anxiously the lieutenant and his men awaited for word from Buffalo Bill, for all knew the situation, and a common sympathy and determination bound them together in the strongest friendship in spite of what was due to discipline.

A stern officer on duty and a thorough disciplinarian, Lieutenant Ames devoted much time to caring for his men, and even had a kind word for them and was not only admired by his soldiers but beloved by them as well, for they knew his undaunted nerve and well-trying ability.

At last there came a stir in camp, for the look-out reported that there was a horseman coming toward the fort from the northward.

Lieutenant Ames turned his glass upon him and said:

"It is Bony, the scout, who went away with Cody."

"Now we will get news."

Twenty minutes after Bony rode into the stockade and was greeted with a welcoming cheer by all that made his heart throb with pleasure, and pride in having accomplished his task.

The scout hastily dismounted and walked to the quarters of the lieutenant, who said as he grasped his hand:

"Well, Bony, I am glad to see you, and I feel that you have news."

"Yes, sir, but I don't exactly like it, as our chief has remained alone up in the country, for I see that the other two have not arrived yet."

"No, you are the first since Frank came in with the news from Fatal Camp, as he calls it."

"What have you to report?"

"We followed the center Indian trail, sir, and it led us up toward what some call the Lone Man's Ferry of the Colorado, for there lives a white man, whom the red-skins do not disturb."

"Yes, I have heard of him, and he ferried a scouting party of soldiers across once."

"We camped at night, sir, the chief said, about thirty miles from the crossing, and in the canyon of Navaho Springs."

"That night we were aroused by the chief who saw the Skeleton Scout again—"

"What! that weird terror?"

"Yes, sir, but he got away before the chief could bring him down."

"The next morning, sir, Buffalo Bill said that he would lay a trap for the Skeleton Scout by remaining alone, while the rest of us came back, bringing his horse, and report to you that alone and on foot he could do far better work and remain in hiding, when mounted he could not."

"He wanted you to come on, sir, with four scouts and four soldiers, leaving the balance here as a reserve, and to retreat on if we have to, and there is a fine camp-ground in Navaho Spring Canyon, and one you can readily defend against a large force."

"We started by different trails, sir, Ernest, Gerard and myself, and the chief wished the one that found the shortest way and the best, to lead you by it to Navaho Springs."

"Ernest and Girard have not yet come in, sir, so I guess I'll be your guide."

"It looks that way, Bony, so tell me of your trail, as regards approximate distance, water, wood, grass and the difficulty of traveling."

The scout gave the desired information, and Lieutenant Ames issued orders for those who were to accompany him to hold themselves in readiness, and told the sergeant that he was to remain in command of the fort, with Lasso Lil to look after the scouting.

During the day, many hours apart, and half a day behind Bony, the other scouts came in, Ernest leading the chief's horse, and they made their report to Lieutenant Ames, who still remained in favor of the the trail he had first decided upon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DANGER AHEAD.

BONY was proud that he had won the honor of leading the party to Navaho Springs, and he at once began his preparations to do so.

He was to take a fresh horse, and he looked well to his arms and trappings.

The order was given to start at daylight the next morning, and sharp on time they rode out of the fort.

Bony was in advance as guide, and Lieutenant Ames followed.

Then came the corporal and four soldiers, two of them leading the two pack-animals.

Two scouts followed, each leading an extra horse, and behind, as a rear guard, there came a couple more of Buffalo Bill's men.

It was a plucky little band of eleven men, and they penetrated the land of danger with brave and willing hearts, to go where duty called.

At the fort had been left the sergeant, Lasso Lil, and two other soldiers and scouts.

Bony had marked his way well as he came along, and took advantage of every cut-off on the trail.

There was but one watering-place upon the trail, and the night-camp was to be made there, the next day's ride taking them to Navaho Springs.

They rode at a slow but steady gait, and camped when the sun was yet above the horizon, at a natural rock tank in a ravine, and where there were a few old cedars that furnished wood.

The three scouts on their different trails to the fort had reported that they had not seen any sign of red-skins on their rides, and no living creature save a crow and a coyote, so wild was the country and desolate.

The start was made early the next morning and the distant ragged cliffs that marked the Navaho Springs were pointed out by Bony to the lieutenant, who swept the whole way with his glass.

No water was found in the long day's march, no grass or wood, and the tired and thirsty men and animals looked forward anxiously to their arrival at the Navaho Springs.

"Bony!" suddenly called out the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir."

"I certainly saw several forms just now about the opening that you point out as being the springs canyon."

"The chief must be there, sir."

"But the chief is alone."

"True, sir."

"And I saw four forms distinctly."

"Can he have already rescued Lord Mildmay's party, sir?"

"I think these looked like red-skins, Bony."

"You take the glass, for you know the surroundings of the mouth of the canyon, and see what you make out."

The scout did so, and while the party rode on he and the lieutenant halted to one side.

"There is some one there, Lieutenant Ames, for I saw one run around a boulder and dart into the canyon, and it was an Indian."

"What is to be done then?"

"I hardly know what to say, sir."

"We cannot retreat now, and I would die before I would leave Cody in the lurch, if he is in trouble, so I shall go on, and you can make a circuit alone, out of range of rifles from the mouth of the canyon, and when you see the trail going into it you can tell the number of those there."

"The very idea, sir."

"Ride on as though you were going to the canyon, then pass, as though continuing on to the crossing of the river, for, now I

think of it, they will not fire on you while expecting to ambush us."

"That's so, sir."

"When you have passed you can signal me how many there are, for if ten, hold up one arm, if more, raise your arm once slowly for every ten."

"I understand, sir."

"They will doubtless fall back up the canyon to ambush us when we approach the springs, so I will dismount, take to the rocks and surprise them."

"The very thing, sir; but if they should prove to be heavy in numbers?"

"We can then only retreat the way we came and I will dispatch a scout to Fort Wingate for help."

"It's about all you can do, sir; but I hope they have not gotten the chief."

"I sincerely trust that they have not; but we may soon know."

As they neared the entrance to the canyon, Bony rode on ahead and went along as though he was merely guiding the party.

All watched the brave fellow ride close to the mouth of the canyon and only in an indifferent way, while, a few moments after his left arm was raised above his head, lowered, raised again, lowered and so continued until it had counted, according to the signal agreed upon, forty Indians in the canyon.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A TURNABOUT FAIR PLAY.

LIEUTENANT AMES smiled grimly, as he saw the scout's arm rise and fall, signaling to him the number he would have to meet.

"Four times, and that means about forty, according to the trail-marks."

"I am sorry there are so many, and glad there are no more."

"We are eleven, and more than a match for double their number, with our repeating rifles, but I do not wish a fight here that may upset some of Cody's plans."

He was speaking to himself, or rather musing, but he was determined to go right on, dismount his men at the mouth of the canyon, and, when the enemy expected him to ride into an ambush, endeavor to surprise them.

Without halting he gave his men in a few words the plan he intended to follow, and as they began to near the entrance to the canyon they noted that Bony had turned back.

He reached the canyon before they did, dismounted and began to reconnoiter.

Then a halt was called, one man was left to hold the horses and the others followed Lieutenant Ames, who himself carried a rifle, on the attempt to surprise their foes.

Bony had gained a position in the entrance to the canyon and called out:

"They have gone into ambush about the lower spring."

"I saw an Indian's head peering over the rocks."

"Then I have an idea, Bony."

"We will go back and mounting our horses ride by, for they will see us, and think, as they saw you pass, that we have gone on to the river."

"But we will dismount, hide our horses, and go into ambush here, so when they come out we will turn the tables upon them."

The scouts gave the young officer a glance of admiration for his scheme, and it was at once carried into execution.

The party halted a moment at the stream coming out of the canyon, and which was lost in the sands of the plain a few hundred feet beyond.

After giving their animals a drink, with unseen foes gazing upon them from half a mile up the canyon, they rode on, and once by the large entrance to the chasm in the cliff, they quickly halted, their horses were led into a retreat among the rocks and Lieutenant Ames placed his men in a position where he could rake at close quarters any one who came out of the canyon.

Tired, hungry, thirsty as they were, the men forgot themselves in the duty to be done, and each scout and soldier took the best position he could secure, and from whence he could see his lieutenant and get the signal to fire.

The officer, with Scout Bony by his side, had taken up a commanding position which gave him a view up the canyon, through the

branches of a stunted cedar tree, and he had his glass leveled toward the spring.

They had not long to wait, for having seen the scout ride by, and then the others, after a short halt in the spring stream, follow toward the river, the Indians, for Indians they were, felt sure that their enemy had gone on to the river.

They were disappointed in their fight just then, but felt that they could catch them upon the river-bank, under the cliffs, and wipe them out with but little danger to themselves.

So they came out of their ambush about the spring and cautiously advanced toward the mouth of the canyon, their chief some distance ahead of the others.

"There they come, sir."

"Yes, and they are just forty-one in number," said the lieutenant, counting them as they appeared from ambush.

"Lieutenant."

"Yes, Bony."

"Look at their chief."

"Ah! he is a white man," and the lieutenant leveled his glass upon him.

"He is, sir, surely, with an Indian head-dress and costume."

"You are right, and we want him alive, Bony."

"We do, sir, as a frightful example to other renegades who hear what his fate will be," and the scout gave a grim smile.

All unconscious that their foes had turned the tables upon them, and had not continued on to the river to camp for the night, the Indians followed their chief down to the mouth of the canyon.

Nearer and nearer they came, all halting while the chief cautiously advanced alone to peer out and see how far away the enemy was.

All were in range, and the eye of every scout and soldier was upon Lieutenant Ames, awaiting his signal to fire.

CHAPTER XL.

AN UNSEEN ALLY.

LIEUTENANT AMES stood peering through the stunted cedars and calmly taking in the situation.

He was as unmoved as though in camp, and his clear, piercing eyes fell upon the face of the renegade chief and watched the position of the Indians, who were huddled together.

"It will be like firing into a flock of partridges, Bony, no bullet will miss," he whispered, and then came in sharp, decisive tones:

"Fire, all of you!"

The lieutenant's own rifle cracked first and the other ten came like a volley.

The eleven bullets sped for human targets, and down fell half a dozen red-skins dead in their tracks, while yells of terror rent the air, as the startled Indians turned to fly back up the canyon.

The chief, at the voice of the lieutenant, had bounded close in under the rocks and fled like a deer, while the repeating rifles of the scouts and soldiers rattled rapidly as the red-skins sped along for a place of safety.

"Crowd them, men!"

"Give them no chance to hide and turn on us."

"Follow me!"

So said Lieutenant Ames, and springing from his position he threw himself into his saddle and dashed into the canyon, followed by his men as rapidly as they could mount.

But suddenly there came a wild and terrible cry up the canyon:

"Felton Pardee, I want your life and will have it now!"

The voice came from up the canyon, beyond the flying Indians, and caused them to halt in their flight.

It was but for a second, and yet in that time a puff of smoke came out of a crevice in the cliff, a sharp report followed, and the renegade chief of the Indians fell, a bullet in his brain.

Then there followed from the same position from whence had come the fatal shot a rapid fire right into the center of the Indians, who were caught between two fires.

"Drive them to that canyon to the right and there is no escape for them, for you will have them hemmed in!" came in the same deep tones that had before addressed the renegade chief by name.

A cheer followed, with a rush from Lieutenant Ames and his men, and rather than dash up the canyon across an open space, the Indians rushed for the canyon referred to on the right and disappeared in it.

But, as they fled the soldiers and scouts pressed them hard and a number fell under their fire.

Lieutenant Ames would have followed but was checked by the voice of their unseen ally, crying:

"Hold! you will but rush to your ruin."

"Guard the mouth of that blind canyon and you have them, for only a bird can escape from it!"

"I thank you, sir, and will be glad to have you come down and join us," answered the lieutenant, who, in spite of the voice being different, was half-way inclined to believe that it was Buffalo Bill.

"Thank you, no, for I have work elsewhere."

"My task here is accomplished in the killing of the renegade chief, Felton Pardee."

"Unless you are backed by a large force, my advice is for you to retreat out of this country as soon as you can do so."

"It is growing late—good-night!"

They did not see the speaker, nor had they seen him.

The men were mystified, and Lieutenant Ames was at a loss what to think.

But the safety of all demanded quick action, and going into the Blind Canyon, he saw that it was narrow for quite a distance and then extended back for a quarter of a mile.

The walls were very high, hundreds of feet, of rough sandstone, and nothing could scale them.

A stream hardly larger than a pencil trickled down the canyon, showing that there was a little water at its head.

Calling to his men, Lieutenant Ames quickly rolled boulders across the narrowest space, and where there was a straight line between the rocky walls, for two hundred yards.

The strong breastwork was made breast high and three men, a scout and two soldiers were at once placed on guard there.

Other men went up to the spring to see if there were any red-skins in their camp there, and to stake the horses out to feed, bring wood and water and prepare supper.

A scout sentinel was later placed at the entrance to the Springs Canyon, to report the coming of any foe, and then the little party awaited for the night to pass, getting what sleep they could by turns, but all on the *qui vive* to answer a call when needed, for that their red-skin enemies would attempt to break out every one felt quite certain.

CHAPTER XL.

LIEUTENANT AMES'S CLEVER DEVICE.

Not a sound had been heard from the red-skins who had fled up the Blind Canyon, since they had disappeared around a bend of the rocky wall.

But for the mysterious unseen ally they would have fled on up the the main canyon, where there camp was, with plenty of food, water and grass about them.

But he had started them with a rush up the Blind Canyon, and Lieutenant Ames had pushed them so hard they had no other alternative but to fly in that direction.

Having quickly disposed of supper, staked their horses out, and ascertained that there were no red-skins up the main canyon, Lieutenant Ames had placed a guard on the edge of the plain, and with all of his other men camped at the breastwork he had made.

These men were kept on watch, and eyes and ears were turned to catch sight of a moving form or hear the slightest sound.

Midnight came and not a sound had been heard.

The lieutenant had gained a few hours' sleep the first part of the night, for he felt confident the rush to escape would not be made there.

But he was awakened at midnight and took his position as one of the watchers.

Bony was upon one side of him, the corporal upon the other, and the rest slept right there, their rifles in their hands.

Presently Bony crept to the side of the officer and said:

"They are coming, sir."

"I heard nor saw anything."

"My ears are more acute, sir."

"Wake the men."

The men were awakened and silently took their ponies behind the barrier of boulders, their rifles rested upon them.

"Bony."

"Yes, sir."

"Light that fire-ball and throw it now."

A fire ball had been made of handkerchiefs, soaked in alcohol, and with a stone inside to give it weight.

A candle, with the blaze concealed, had been kept burning, and drawing on a heavy buckskin glove, Bony took up the ball, touched it to the flame of the candle and with all his might sent it flying up the canyon.

Like a shooting star it sped along, fell heavily a hundred yards away and illuminating the narrow canyon with its towering walls, revealed the Indians slowly creeping on hands and knees toward the barrier, to break through their foes and escape.

Instantly there flashed forth a line of flame from the rifles, the reports echoing as though a regiment had fired, and the bullets went pattering into the mass of red humanity with terrible effect.

"Keep up the fire!" shouted Lieutenant Ames, and the repeating-rifles rattled away terrifically.

"Follow me! charge!"

The command of the gallant young Ames was followed by a cheer, and every man sprung over the breastwork, carrying two or more logs in their arms.

They ran up the canyon for a couple of hundred yards and deposited their burden in a pile over the still blazing fire ball, and a fire was at once kindled, which shed its light back to the bend in the chasm.

"Now, back again, men, and we will see if we are again disturbed to-night," and the lieutenant felt just pride in his conception of the fire-ball and fire to show the position of the enemy and to prevent their approaching again in the darkness.

Half a dozen red skins had fallen under the fire, but the wounded had been dragged off by their comrades, for an Indian never deserts a wounded comrade, and only when the hardest pressed a dead one.

The little force of heroes now lay down to sleep with a feeling of far greater security, only one man being kept on watch at the barrier, and another was sent to stand guard with the sentinel at the mouth of the canyon.

The fire burned brightly, illuminating the canyon back to the bend, and doubtless causing the imprisoned red-skins to gnash their teeth with rage.

Thus the night wore away until just before dawn, when the guard called up the men, for half a dozen Indians had boldly come in sight around the bend, as though meditating another charge.

"Give them a few shots, men, to show how far our rifles will kill," said Lieutenant Ames.

Several rifles flashed together and one Indian fell, while the rest fled like deer around the bend to shelter.

Day dawned soon after and Lieutenant Ames looked about him to see what his triumph had been and what his prospects were, while he said to Bony:

"Scout, go up to the position, if you can, held by our mysterious friend last night, and see if you can make any discovery regarding him, and where he went."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LIEUTENANT'S PLAN.

WITH the bright glare of day the men felt more at ease.

They had met a force four times their own, had evaded an ambush, and defeated their foes, with a loss, the count showed, of a dozen slain and how many wounded they did not know.

They had the balance of the enemy hemmed in beyond escape, and had captured half a hundred ponies, a couple of fine horses that had belonged to the renegade chief, and the camp outfit of the band of Indians.

A search of the chief's body revealed that he carried a belt of gold, amounting to considerable, a bag of nuggets of the same precious metal, a pair of revolvers marked with the name "Captain Champagne," and some traps belonging to the same person, who was

now known to be no other than Trevor DeVillers, if he was yet alive.

There were some papers on the body which stamped him as the man bearing the name he had been called by the unknown ally of the night before, and he wore upon his finger a massive ring bearing the letters "F. P.," which beyond doubt stood for Felton Pardee.

All these things Lieutenant Ames took charge of, and then had the body buried along with those of the Indians, but slightly apart, and his grave marked.

As the horses could not escape from the canyon, with the camp below them, they were all turned loose excepting half a dozen that were kept saddled for quick use, if needed.

The camp was pitched under some willows near the barrier, so that the men would be ready at an instant's notice, and the sentinel at the mouth of the Springs Canyon was stationed high up on a cliff, to overlook the plains and approaches for thirty miles upon either side, for from no other direction could an enemy approach, save by the way Buffalo Bill had come along the summit of the mighty cliff range.

Bony had, with great difficulty, scaled the cliff to the position occupied by the unseen ally during the fight, but found there only a small resting-place among the rocks.

Back from the place a narrow, very dangerous, zigzag trail led up the cliffs to the broader way by which Buffalo Bill had descended, and by this the man had made his retreat, night though it was, and which made it a far more hazardous undertaking.

Whither he had gone the scout could not tell, and he returned to make his report to Lieutenant Ames, who remarked:

"I would give much to know who he is.

"He had it in for that renegade chief, for some reason, and squared matters with him last night and we certainly owe much to him."

"We do, indeed, sir."

"Well, Bony, what do you think of our prisoners up the canyon?"

"They'll make another dash to-night, sir."

"Beyond doubt, and I hope with the same results.

"So far we have been more than fortunate, for we have not even had a man or horse wounded, and we have made quite a capture, killed a dozen Indians, and have thirty hemmed in, with the chance of bagging or killing them all."

"We have done splendidly, sir; but we will hear from those red birds when they get good and hungry, and they will be as desperate as wild-cats at bay."

"No doubt of it; but this is where Buffalo Bill told you to have us wait for him, so we hold the whip hand and can afford to wait."

"If the red devils did not catch the chief in the canyon, sir."

"Ah! that is to be thought of though Buffalo Bill is not to be caught napping."

"He is not, sir, and yet he is human and I only hope no harm has befallen him; but if he does not come in to-morrow, sir, I would like to ask permission of you to take one of the scouts and go on his trail."

"I will be glad to have you do so, Bony, and I will tell you what I have decided on."

"Yes, sir."

"To send a scout through with all speed to old Fort Maroni, and have him get a fresh mount there and push for Wingate, carrying a report to Colonel Baldwin, and requesting him to send a couple of troops out as a reserve, one going to Fatal Camp to remain within call, the other to Fort Maroni.

"The colonel can send what force he deems proper, and with such reserves within call in two directions from us, we can retreat upon them, or have them come to our aid, if Buffalo Bill has been killed or captured."

"Lieutenant, you'll wear an eagle on your shoulder-straps before you are thirty-five, is my prediction, for you are the very man for frontier fighting," said Bony with admiration for the young officer's genius and nerve, and calling the sergeant into the council for he too was an old Indian-fighter, the matter was thoroughly discussed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BESIEGED RED-SKINS.

THE band of Indians who had been driven into the canyon, from which there was no

retreat, save by death or surrender, were certainly in a very unenviable frame of mind.

They had lost their renegade white chief, upon whom they had wholly relied, a dozen of their warriors had fallen, as many more lay about among the rocks, more or less seriously wounded, their camping outfit and ponies were captured, and without water or food they were in a desperate condition.

They had made one desperate break for liberty, to be revealed by the fire-ball and driven back by a hot fire with loss.

Then, to their surprise and delight the pale-faces had made a charge.

They got ready to receive them, rallied in a group to dash through, and in their desperation killed their severely wounded to prevent their falling into the hands of their foes.*

That was just what they wanted, for they had counted their foes and knew that they more than doubled them still, so, with a rush they could go by them, killing some, regain the larger canyon, capture their horses and get away.

But their rage and disappointment knew no bounds when they saw what the charge of the soldiers meant, that it was to build a huge fire of logs and keep their actions revealed.

Seeing that they were thus more at the mercy of their foes they held a pow-wow at which all assembled.

They could only come to the conclusion that the next night they would be ready to rush as soon as it grew dark, and give the whites no time to build a fire.

When this was decided upon they sought what rest they could get.

But the day dawned and the pale-faces were ready for any movement they might make, yet able to care well for themselves.

The Indian ponies were found to be good ones, and the outfit captured in the camp was by no means trifling.

Lieutenant Ames had wood gathered, tied the small pieces in bundles, got together large logs, and placed all on some *travois* which were made to drag the logs to the canyon and start a fire.

He had a number of fire-balls made to throw and light the heap, into which powder had been placed to ignite it.

Determined not to wait until night to place the wood in position he advanced his whole force with rifles, except three men who led the horses dragging the *travois* of wood.

The Indians rallied for an attack, and retreated to the further end of the canyon, when to their surprise they saw that they had been beaten at their own game of cunning and artifice, for halting his men the lieutenant had the horses drag their loads of wood into position, and in a minute the pile was all ready to ignite.

Then the retreat was made to the barrier without the loss of a man.

The red-skins showed their fury in wild yells, and gathered as near the wood-pile as they dared, to prevent another advance to light the fire.

But what was their rage when, as darkness began to fall, suddenly to see fire-balls flying through the air, thrown by strong and skilled throwers.

Ball after ball fell near, until at last one, thrown by the corporal, fell into the pile, there was a flash as it ignited the grains of powder and the work was done, for the small wood began to kindle from the other fire-balls thus set on fire.

Again came the furious and defiant yells of the red-skins, who were now driven to the pitch of madness, and in their desperation they rallied and started upon a rush to break through the barrier.

"Throw no shots away, men.

"Ready! aim! fire!" cried Lieutenant Ames sternly, and the rifles flashed together.

Under the rain of lead that met them the Indians recoiled and after a moment of hesitation ran back to cover, this time in sullen silence.

They were suffering the pangs of hunger and thirst now, added to their fury, disappointment and despair, and the night passed without another effort to break through,

* It has been known in several instances that red-skins have put their severely wounded to death rather than have them fall alive into the hands of cruel foes.—THE AUTHOR.

though, unable to sleep themselves, they would not allow their foes to do so.

With the morning a new phase came to the situation, for something they had not looked for added to their danger and misery.

It was the falling of a huge rock from the cliff heights above, and breaking into atoms, the pieces scattered all about them, causing them to seek hiding-places from this new peril.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN INDIAN POW-WOW.

HARDLY had the Indians discovered that they had to face a new danger, from the rocks falling from the cliff-tops, for several came down in rapid succession into the canyon, when another peril faced them.

Far up, among the clouds it seemed, was seen a puff of smoke, and the echo of a rifle went rumbling in thunder tones among the canyons, while a bullet flattened itself out to the size of half a dollar as it fell by the side of the warrior who had taken the place of the dead renegade as leader.

Another puff, another rumbling sound and a brave near was nearly hit by the falling lead.

With a foe above, hemmed in, starved, suffering the agonies of thirst, and no escape, the Indians hastily held a pow-wow.

Braves talked quickly, and not with their usual delay and dignity, and the pow-wow lasted but a very short while.

Then one of the Indians stepped out of the group and silently walked down the canyon.

His comrades gazed after him, anxious, silent and stern.

It was the man who was acting as chief, and he had a cruel face, a serpent-like eye and was cunning and shrewd.

He passed the smoldering fire and then, as though it was an effort for him to humble himself, raised his hands with the palms toward his foes.

He stood thus a moment and then he took off his belt and placed his bow and arrows and a pistol at his feet.

"Come on, red-skin, for I've been looking for you," called out Bony, and the Indian at once advanced.

"Come quicker, Reddy," cried Bony and the warrior quickened his pace.

"Halt!"

The Indian stopped short.

"It's all right, so come along now; but leave your blanket to show that you have no concealed weapons about you."

The Indian threw aside his blanket and came at a rapid walk.

Back at the bend his comrades were peering around at him, anxiously watching the outcome.

"How are you, Joe?" said Bony, and he extended his hand as "Joe" advanced.

"How?" and the Indian grasped the scout's hand.

"Come to surrender, have you?"

"No speak," he said in broken English.

"You are a liar from Liarsville, for I caught you on your trail here, as all I called out to you you promptly answered."

"If you are going to play the 'no English speak' game with this outfit, just push the breeze back again to your brothers, and we'll open the ball to the same dance music again."

"I talk your tongue a little bit, but you speak English, or git."

"The Flying Fox speak little bit pale-face-tongue."

"I thought so, and you'll speak more before you go."

"Come and see the white chief," and he led him to where Lieutenant Ames was waiting for him, for when it was reported to him that rocks were being thrown into the canyon from the cliff-tops, and shots fired, the young officer had said:

"That is our unseen ally, Bony, and he will bring the fellows to terms quickly."

It was very soon after that an Indian was reported coming toward the barrier with signs of peace, and the lieutenant prepared to receive him.

He smiled at the conversation held with

* It is a common thing with plainsmen to call all Indians they do not know "Joe," as negroes whose names are unknown are called "John."

the red messenger by Bony, and took the red-skin in from head to foot as he advanced.

He saw that his eyes were sunken, his face haggard and that he suffered from hunger and thirst.

A humane man, he pitied the enemy he had at his mercy and called to a soldier to hand him a tin cup of water.

Suffering though he was the brave refused to take it, but said:

"The Flying Fox asks nothing from the pale-face chief but to pass out with his dead and wounded brothers."

"Pretty good English that," muttered Bony.

"Yes, and sentiment too," added Lieutenant Ames, who responded:

"The Flying Fox and his brothers sought to kill my braves, and they had a pale-face renegade as their chief."

"We have driven them into close quarters, where they will starve or be killed, if they do not surrender."

"The Flying Fox knows."

"He would depart with his brothers."

"No, he shall not go away to bring down a large force upon us; but they may surrender and be held prisoners, and have food, while their wounds will be cared for, if they submit."

"If they refuse they must die."

"My brothers know."

"And will submit?"

"The Flying Fox speaks for them," was the dignified response of the Indian.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CALL FOR HELP.

LIEUTENANT AMES congratulated himself that affairs were going in a way to please him.

He had sent a courier, one of the scouts, by way of Maroni, with a report to Colonel Baldwin, giving the exact situation, and asking for a troop to bivouac at the fatal camp, the messenger scout to guide them there, and that would have them within twelve hours' ride of Navaho Springs if they were needed.

Another troop sent to Maroni would be within call from that point, and those of the original party left there could come on to Navaho Springs and join him.

He reported Cody the chief of scouts as being off alone on the trail, the presence in their camp of an unknown ally, the capture of twenty-six Indians, and some of whom were wounded, and the killing of fifteen more, with their outfit and fifty-three ponies, and two fine horses, all having been under a renegade white chief.

He also made known that the Mildmay party had been captured, and he believed could be rescued.

The report was a concise but thorough one, and an exact resume of the situation, with the request that no dread need be felt for his party, as he was in a spot he could defend against hundreds and stand a siege of days, while there was a getting-out place for a courier did he have to send to either of the troops for aid.

The messenger departed just after the surrender of Flying Fox and his braves, and then the lieutenant set about strengthening his camp, making Bony and the corporal his aides.

The horse left in the bend of the canyon by Buffalo Bill had been found, but there was nothing to account for his presence there, so that was a mystery to all, some believing that he belonged to the unknown ally, for no one there recognized the saddle and bridle hanging on a tree near the barrier.

The Flying Fox having come to terms quickly shook hands with the lieutenant, dashed off several cups of water, accepted a bundle of cigarettes and asked for a drink of fire-water, the latter request being refused.

He went back to his people, and they put their heads together for half an hour trying to plan treachery, and, advancing in force, massacre the whites and come out victors.

Every brave was armed and had his orders, and they advanced slowly and with apparent deep dejection.

Flying Fox had explained the situation fully, and two, or more, braves, as the case might transpire, were to throw themselves

upon one pale-face and end him there and then.

They came around the bend with apparent sullen despair, but with secretly high hope of success.

But Lieutenant Ames was not to be caught napping and they looked into the muzzles of half a score of rifles, peering over the barrier and heard the words:

"Halt!"

"The Flying Fox will come first, and then his warriors one a time!"

A groan ran through the group of red-skins, but there was no help for it and one at a time they advanced.

The Flying Fox was made to lay down his weapons before he reached the barrier and to order his braves to do the same.

Then he was seized by two of the scouts who were skilled in the work, and found himself securely bound in a minute of time.

The others came as called, and each one was bound, those who were wounded being tenderly cared for, yet secured beyond escape.

The red-skins were enraged at being bound, but there was no help for it but to submit.

They were given a good camping-place, and were at once well fed, for they were terribly hungry.

A guard was placed over them, and then Lieutenant Ames set the men to work, save the two guards, in fortifying the entrance to the canyon, which was fortunately, for his purpose, naturally adapted for it.

He had asked Colonel Baldwin for a surgeon to be sent to Maroni to come on with the courier-scout upon his return, and a fresh supply of provisions and ammunition as well, so said, as they worked at the wall of rocks.*

"When our scout comes back, Bony, with more provisions, a surgeon and the force under the sergeant at old Maroni, we can stand a siege of a month and fight off an army of red-skins."

"That's what we can do, sir," was the reply of the scout, who, with all the others were proud of their work and their position.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TO THE RESCUE.

THE scout who bore the dispatch to Fort Wingate, departed from Navaho Springs with a well fed and rested horse.

He took the trail by which Bony had led the party to the canyon, and not having to hunt the trail, made good time.

With rest ahead of him, he did not camp often, or remain long, and arrived at the old fort just ten hours after leaving the springs, having made a splendid ride of it.

The sergeant, Lasso Lil, and the others heard the story of all that had happened, and were glad that they were to go on and join the lieutenant, and began to make preparations to start the following morning.

Two fine horses were selected for the scout, who was known as Little Rebel, from the fact that he was little over five feet in height, weighed a hundred pounds and had been a Confederate soldier.

He was a splendid rider, could endure any hardship, and would fight, as his comrades expressed it, a buzz saw.

He carried with him no more than was necessary for subsistence and comfort, and set out with one horse leading and bearing only his pack.

Little Rebel was determined to make a record in his ride to the fort, and so had prepared for it accordingly.

When he started, the sergeant and his little command pulled out for Navaho Springs, following the trail the others had taken, and being anxious to get there with all dispatch.

While they were plodding along, Little Rebel was pushing his horses at a five-mile clip.

He camped an hour for noon, and timed himself as having made twenty-five miles.

In the six hours of the afternoon he had added thirty, and after supper and a rest of two hours he rode ten miles further, making sixty-five for his first day.

He added ten miles to this for his journey of the second day, changing from horse to horse frequently, and the last twenty-four

* A part of the breastworks thrown up by Lieutenant Ames are still seen in the canyon of Navaho Springs.—THE AUTHOR.

hours of his ride held on almost continuously.

When he rode into Fort Wingate, dirt-grimed, haggard-faced, tired and sleepy, with his two horses showing the effects of the very hard ride, he reported at once to Colonel Baldwin, and gave him the dispatches he had.

The colonel listened to the story of his ride, complimented him highly upon what he had accomplished, and said:

"Come back to me after you have had rest and food, Yankton, and I will talk with you."

Then Colonel Baldwin sat down to read carefully the report of Lieutenant Ames.

"I don't half like this disappearance of Cody, for it looks ominous," he mused.

"But Ames has a wise head upon him, and with all his dash and daring is too cautious to make a mistake, and he knows what he is about."

"Who this mysterious unknown ally can be I cannot understand, but he has done good service certainly."

"Ames deserves credit for his clever capture of red-skins four times his own force in number, and will hold his own, but I will send the two troops he asks for, and a light gun with each force."

"Doctor Preston, the second assistant surgeon, will be glad to go, and he shall do so."

"Now to this capture of Mildmay and his party."

"It looks bad, and I only hope that no harm has befallen him, and he may be rescued."

"Well, I will give orders for the troops to get ready to leave in the morning, and will send Ames the provisions he asks for and other things."

"That Little Rebel, as they call Yankton, has certainly made a good ride of it, and he will guide the troops to their separate rendezvous."

So mused the colonel, until, after having given the scout rest for some hours, he sent for him and heard all that he had to say.

Little Rebel told the situation as it was, praised the lieutenant's conduct of affairs, and said that he felt sure all would come out well in the end.

"What do you think of Cody's being away alone on a scout?"

"Don't mind him, colonel, for the chief knows just what he is about, and he's in no danger, for he can take care of himself."

"Well, Yankton, can you guide the party back?"

"You bet I can, colonel, and I'm ready now," was the prompt reply.

"All right, the command starts at six o'clock in the morning, and you shall bear my letter to Lieutenant Ames."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DESERTED CAMP.

SHARP as six A. M. the relief party pulled out of Wingate on the march.

Mounted upon a fresh horse Little Rebel led the way, while behind him followed four scouts who were to be divided between the two commands when they should part company.

There were two cavalry troops of eight men each, and two light field guns, six-pounders, with two officers and twenty men.

A couple of four-mule ambulances, several army wagons, and a number of extra horses completed the outfit, the senior captain commanding until the Fatal Camp should be reached.

The scout Yankton set the pace, anxious to surprise Lieutenant Ames with the rapidity of his carrying out his orders, and near noon on the third day, the Fatal Camp was reached.

There one troop and one gun was left, with two of the scouts, and Little Rebel led the others on toward Fort Maroni.

It was a new country to nearly every one in the party, and they all suffered, men and animals alike, from the arid plains and scarcity of water.

But there was not a murmur, and the rapid pace the guide set was not objected to as they would sooner get to rest and comfort.

The next evening they filed into the valley in which was the Maroni plain, and that night they camped in security in the walls of the old Mormon fort.

They had hardly more than halted when

Little Rebel, having looked to his two horses, sought Captain Jamar, where he sat with his lieutenant, one of the officers of the gun, and Doctor Preston, and said:

"Shall I be ready to start at dawn, Captain Jamar?"

"That is as Surgeon Preston wishes, Yankton, for he goes on with you," was the answer.

"By leaving early, sir, and pushing on hard, we can reach Lieutenant Ames by night, sir, and it would be best not to camp, as there will be only the surgeon and myself, and some six pack-horses, I believe."

"There will be six-pack animals, Yankton; but I shall send one of my scouts and four cavalymen along with you, both as an escort, and to learn the trail, while they can also bring me news of Ames and his men, if Cody has turned up, and what is going on up there in that blasted country."

"Yes, sir; but I shall be ready to start then at dawn?" urged Little Rebel, still anxious to go back with all haste.

"What do you say, Preston?" and the captain turned to a handsome young officer wearing the shoulder-straps of an assistant surgeon.

"If Scout Yankton thinks there is need for haste, sir, I am ready to start to-night," was the reply, and Little Rebel muttered:

"He's a dandy, and I'll have no trouble with him."

"Well, as Yankton seems anxious to start early, suppose you set the hour at dawn."

"A little before, sir, for we could break-fast ten miles out on the trail," suggested Yankton with a salute.

"All right, Yankton, I'll be ready in the saddle before it is really light," Surgeon Preston said, and Little Rebel departed to see that the very best horses were selected for the trip and to have all in readiness.

It was still the gray of early dawn when Little Rebel rode out of the stockade, a brother scout by his side, and with Surgeon Preston close behind.

Then came a corporal and following him were six soldiers leading as many pack-horses.

Little Rebel lost no time in getting well on the way, for the sun rising found them some miles from camp, and when a halt was made for breakfast both men and horses were ready to rest.

After a halt of an hour they pressed on until noon, when a halt was ordered by Surgeon Preston for two hours, as there was no grass or water beyond until Navaho Springs was reached.

The rapid pace from Fort Wingate was beginning to tell on both men and horses, but rest lay ahead, and so the riders did not spare their animals, or rather Little Rebel did not, for he set the pace.

It was growing late in the afternoon, when Little Rebel pointed out to Surgeon Preston the distant break in the red cliffs that marked the canyon in which were the Navaho Springs.

"We will push on then, Yankton, to get in by nightfall," said the lieutenant, and the tired horses were urged on the faster.

Whether their instinct told them that water and rest lay ahead or not, they certainly appeared refreshed and went along at a lively gait that brought them to the canyon just as the sun was setting.

"My God! they are not here!" came in startled tones from Little Rebel as he saw that the canyon was deserted.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SLIP OF PAPER.

SURGEON PRESTON gazed into the face of the scout with a look of sympathy, so keenly did he show how deep was his disappointment to find Lieutenant Ames and his party not at the canyon.

He had ridden hard, sacrificing himself without a murmur, caring nothing for his own fatigue and suffering, to get back and show the lieutenant how quickly and well he had obeyed his orders.

He knew that he would arrive several days before he would expect him, and he was proud of his record.

Glancing into the canyon he saw that it was in reality deserted.

So he said:

"Let the men go into camp, sir, while I

reconnoiter, for I wish to find what has happened."

"Do you think harm has befallen them?" asked Preston, anxiously.

"If they had retreated, sir, it would have been on Maroni, and they did not go that way."

"Nor was there a trail branching off at the bend of the cliff, which would have been the case had they been forced to retreat by the Fatal Camp."

"What do you surmise then, Little Rebel?"

"I'll tell you when I know more, sir," and giving his horse to a soldier to care for, he called the other scout and the two began to closely examine the trails leading in and out of the canyon.

The nature of the ground there was such that a trail hardly showed, but at last Little Rebel's keen eyes detected a trail leading off toward the ferry.

The two followed it as long as there was light, and then returned to the canyon.

Surgeon Preston meanwhile had camped his men, the horses were unsaddled and staked out, and wood gathered to build a fire, but he would not have it lighted until the return of the scout, to see if it was wise or not to do so.

When the two scouts approached he called out:

"Well, Yankton, what news?"

"I found a trail, sir, left by shod horses ponies going toward the river."

"Well?"

"It was the trail of Lieutenant Ames's party, sir, but there were a number of tracks, and it might be that he was going willingly, and may be not."

"How do you mean?"

"If he was overwhelmed here, sir, by Indians, he and his men would go as captives."

"True; but what is to be done now?"

"I see nothing else than to camp here until morning and then we will see what is best."

"Dare we light a fire?"

"Oh, yes, sir, for a fire here can never be seen over those giant cliffs, and there is no one in front of the canyon."

"Light the fire, men," was the order, and it was done, one of the soldiers preparing supper.

"I will stand guard half the night, sir, at the mouth of the canyon and my pard here can take it the other half, for we must keep our eyes open."

"But you are worn out, Yankton, and I will take your place."

"No, Surgeon Preston, I thank you, my eyes are better able to see a foe, so I'll stand, and half the night will give me sleep enough."

"You know best."

"Just where you are, sir, was Lieutenant Ames's lay-out, right by that rock— Hello! what is this?"

He stepped up to the rock as he spoke and saw the object that had caught his eye.

It was a piece of folded paper, with a sharpened stick stuck through it into a crack of the rock.

At once he took it off and handed it to the surgeon, who opened it and read aloud:

"A call from Cody causes me to leave this camp and go to the crossing of the Colorado."

"If I leave there I will find means of notifying the one who seeks to find me."

"ROBERT F. AMES."

"Lieutenant Commanding."

Almost a cheer was in the exclamations of joy that ran through the little group at the knowledge that the gallant Ames and his men had not been overwhelmed by Indians, but had left of his own accord, and that Cody had been heard from.

"Ah! here is something more," cried Surgeon Preston, and he continued reading:

"IMPORTANT!"

"It will be well, from news just received, for the one who finds this to at once go to the Fatal Camp and request the officer who was to camp there, to move up to this canyon and hold it."

"State to him that I will post him of my movements, and his force and that to hold Fort Maroni can be quickly rallied with Navaho Springs as a relief post."

"AME."

"Well, Yankton, what do you advise now, for you know I am not commanding a company, or an Indian fighter?" said Surgeon Preston frankly.

"To send a letter, sir, with this, to Captain Irving at the Fatal Camp, asking him to move to this point, while you and I go on tomorrow to the river and see if we can find Lieutenant Ames."

"Good advice and I'll follow it."

"But who will take the letters?"

"I will, sir," said the scouting pard of Little Rebel, and so it was decided, and he at once had his supper and retired to his blankets.

Before day, mounted upon the freshest horse of the outfit, the scout had started on his long ride, while Little Rebel urged Surgeon Preston to hold the fort where he then was while he went alone and on foot to the river to see what discovery he could make.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LITTLE REBEL'S LONE TRAIL.

THE canyon of Navaho Springs was very closely scouted through by Little Rebel, when the day dawned, for he did not know but that he might find some clue further than the slip of paper left by Lieutenant Ames, for the retreat from that strong position.

The scout courier was away with his letters before light came, and all felt a relief when he was gone.

Bright and early the camp was up and breakfast was over when the sun rose, so that Little Rebel and the surgeon could get to work, for the latter said he would like to accompany him on his reconnaissance.

They first discovered how well the lieutenant fortified the entrance to the canyon, leaving an opening in the rocky barrier in zigzag shape and wide enough only to allow of a horse passing through.

Up the canyon, apart from the camping ground, were found graves, a score in number, though several appeared to have been there some time, the others being newly made.

Having decided that it was best for Little Rebel to go alone on the trail to the river, Surgeon Preston asked him in regard to what was best to be done, and the reply was:

"Keep your men in camp here, and let your horses and the pack-animals range at will."

"You have six men, and it would be well to put two on duty at night, at the mouth of the canyon, and one by day, and have them keep a close watch out over the plains."

"If I do not return, hold it out, sir, until Captain Irving does, and he will know what is to be done."

"I hope to get back to-morrow, sir, but may be delayed, and may be killed," and with this philosophical way of looking at matters, Little Rebel shook hands with the young surgeon, who was on his first campaign, and started on foot for the Colorado River.

He took particular notice of the trail he had started upon, and studied it as he went along, but could only make out that it had been made by a very large force.

It was a long and tiresome walk to the river, over the rough and rocky ground, but Little Rebel was one to suffer any lardship in the discharge of duty, and kept up a steady pace.

At every rise he came to, at every bend, he carefully peeped ahead to see if he was going to run into any danger.

At last the lofty cliffs overhanging the river were close at hand, and he went more cautiously.

He had never been along that trail before, never crossed the Colorado, or scouted in the adjacent country, and so it was all guess-work with him, depending wholly upon his skill in plaincraft, the reading of signs, and understanding the lay of land, as he well did.

It was late in the afternoon when he came to the cliffs overhanging the river.

The trail had led along a ridge that jutted out toward the cliffs, and then wound downward by a narrow, rocky and dangerous shelf away to the river shore, visible far below, and bordered with a growth of willows.

Little Rebel stood regarding the scene with admiration, enjoying his first glance at a river that wound its way through chasm-banks thousands of feet in height, a river that was deep, swift-flowing, unknown, and flowed through the weirdest of wonderlands.

After gazing for some minutes in awe he started on his way to the patch of lowland, still following the almost unmarked trail down the rocky shelf.

It took him half an hour to descend to the willow-clad banks below, where there was a formation of earth, a few acres in size at the base of the towering cliffs.

Not a creature was in sight, human or animal, not even a bird.

A row of willows bordered the bank, and between them was a patch of grass rich and long, which had lately been fed over by horses, as the experienced eyes of the scout quickly showed him.

"Well, this looks about the end of the earth to me," muttered Little Rebel.

"The lieutenant came here, and as there is no way of leaving, except to go back, or cross, he has gone over the river."

"Yes, there is the trail, and they swam their horses across."

"But how am I to cross, is the question?"

"I can make a raft for my weapons, blankets and provisions, and swim and push it across before me."

"It's a wild looking country beyond, but I am on the trail to see what has become of Lieutenant Ames, and I'm not one to give up in the sight of success."

"Perhaps I can aid you, sir."

Little Rebel started, turned quickly and beheld a man standing within a few feet of him.

CHAPTER L.

A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

Little Rebel, the scout, was fairly caught off his ground.

He had not believed, at least on that side of the river, that there was a human being nearer to him than his comrades in the Navaho Canyon.

When he turned it was with his hand upon his revolver, though the words had not been unfriendly.

He saw before him a man of commanding presence.

He was tall, erect, with soldierly bearing, broad shoulders and a form that denoted the athlete.

He was dressed in buckskin, wearing moccasins, and even his cap was of the same and of Indian tan.

His face was darkly bronzed, bearded and very expressive, while he wore his hair long, falling nearly to his waist.

At his back was slung a repeating rifle, and in his belt he carried a pair of large revolvers and a long knife.

To his shoulders was strapped a soldier's knapsack, with a blanket rolled up at the top and bottom, and a canteen swung to his belt.

"Well, sir, you are a white man and do not seem unfriendly, but a pale face is no sign of a friend to an honest man in this part of the country," said Little Rebel boldly.

The stranger smiled and replied:

"You put it well, my friend, and yet I am your friend not your foe."

"Can you prove it?"

"Do you need proof?"

"I would rather have it, for words are cheap."

"You have just returned from bearing dispatches to the fort?"

"Ah! you knew this?"

"I do, and more."

"What more?"

"You returned to Navaho Springs to find your friends gone."

"How do you know?"

"I am aware that Navaho Canyon is deserted."

"You are off the trail now, pard."

"Why do you say so?"

"It is not deserted."

"It was vacated by Lieutenant Ames and his party, and when you returned, and permit me to congratulate you upon making a very quick ride of it, you found no one

"You seem to know it all."

"I can tell you more."

"Go ahead, for I like to be entertained," and Little Rebel spoke with a sneer.

"Those now at the canyon you guided there, and finding a note from Lieutenant Ames you left them there while you came to track him and his party."

"See here, pard, you have got it all down fine."

"But you have come to a full stop here, for you see that Ames's trail leads across the river and you do not know how to get across."

"I can find a way."

"Yes, by building a little raft for your clothes and weapons and swimming, but, let me tell you that the waters of the Colorado are icy cold, the stream very deep, the current swift and treacherous, while there are rapids below, so that only the most expert swimmer could make it, and then it would be ten to one that he failed."

"You seem not to wish me to cross?"

"On the contrary, I am anxious that you should go."

"Why?"

"To find Lieutenant Ames."

"Has harm befallen him?"

"There has not."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"Where is he?"

"Across the Colorado."

"Where?"

"In camp."

"With his men?"

"Yes."

"Prisoners?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you know Buffalo Bill?"

"I have met him."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"I have."

"When?"

"Several days ago."

"Where is he?"

"In great danger."

"Ah! you know this?"

"I do."

"How?"

"As I know many other things about this land of mystery, treacherous men, and dangers."

Little Rebel was silent a moment and then said abruptly:

"See here, pard, if you are a villain then the devil has not been able to set his stamp upon your face, and I will trust you."

"But, in this land there are, I know, renegade white men who are even more cruel to their kind than are Indians, and they prey upon their fellows, using red-skins as tools to aid them, so you must pardon me if I wrong you."

"You are a manly fellow, I am sure, and a frank and fearless one, so I will tell you honestly that I saw you on this trail, knew what you intended doing, and so came to take you across the river and will guide you to the camp of Lieutenant Ames."

"You will do this for me?"

"I will."

"Put it there, pard, and you'll find me your friend for life if you do as you say."

The man grasped his hand and then said:

"Wait for me here."

CHAPTER LI.

THE UNKNOWN GUIDE.

LITTLE REBEL saw the man turn at his words and walk rapidly away back toward the cliffs.

He disappeared among the willows that grew there, the scout still watching him, and as he did not reappear in the next ten minutes Little Rebel muttered:

"Have I been sold, and allowed that fellow to get away?"

"Who and what is he I wonder?"

"Whoever he is he knows it all, that is certain—ah! there he comes, and he is carrying a boat on his shoulder."

The stranger was seen coming back again, and, as he neared the river the scout saw he was carrying a canoe built of skin.

He walked as though the weight was

nothing to him, and deposited his boat on the bank.

"It is built of buffalo hides, well-tanned and stretched across a frame as you see; but it will hold us readily and will stand the water for a couple of hours," he said in explanation as he saw the scout examining his boat.

There were two paddles in it, one tied to the side, and a frame-work in the bottom of the boat to keep the feet off the hides.

"I find it very useful, and keep it hidden in the cliffs," he added as he launched the boat and bade the scout get in.

Little Rebel obeyed and the stranger followed and dextrously using the paddle sent the boat flying up the stream.

Darkness had fallen now and the sensation of the scout was a strange one, feeling that he was in that far-away land and under the guidance of a man about whom he knew nothing whatever.

The stranger paddled on up the river for a mile and then came to where a stream flowed into the Colorado on the other side.

Running his boat into the mouth of it he landed, and shouldering the canoe once more started off in a trail that led through some woodland bordering the base of the high cliffs overhanging the river.

"Wait for me here," he said, halting after a short walk, and Little Rebel obeyed.

"This man is either honest, or I'll be shot for a fool as I deserve to be," said the scout when he had been left alone for some minutes.

But the stranger soon appeared and as he approached said:

"Come, now we will go to the camp of your friends."

It was inky black in the woodland and down so deep in the river chasm, but the stranger walked rapidly on, Little Rebel following close upon his heels.

At length they turned to the left and the woodland ended, so the scout saw that they were entering a narrow and deep canyon, a strip of starlit sky being revealed far above.

The mysterious guide walked swiftly on without any comment for a mile or more, when they came to a small stream and small timber once more.

Here he halted and said:

"The trail is on this side; keep near the stream, and half a mile away you will come to an open space in the timber."

"Halt there and hail, for the camp is beyond, and a sentinel seeing you approach would fire upon you without challenging."

"And that is Lieutenant Ames's camp?"

"It is, sir."

"How can I thank you for your kindness in guiding me here?"

"You need not thank me, for I have only done that which I deem my duty."

"What am I to you?"

"A fellow being."

"Who are you, for surely you will tell me?"

"A man who loves this wild, free life."

"It is a most dangerous one?"

"Oh, yes, but I love the excitement of the danger I have to face."

"And do you live here in this wild land, putting up with hardships, facing deadliest dangers every day, merely for the love of it?"

"Oh, no, not altogether."

"You have another motive?"

"I have."

"What is that motive, may I ask?"

"Revenge!"

The word was so sternly uttered, there was such a depth of meaning in it, so much of hatred, that the scout started as he heard the deep voice of the stranger utter it.

"I think I can understand now; but, have you no friends here?"

"None."

"You surely do not dwell alone in this wild land?"

"All alone."

"Will I not see you again? or, will you not now go to camp with me?"

"Oh, no, I cannot do that; but, when will you return?"

"To-morrow night, I hope to start back."

"Then come to this spot after nightfall and I will take you back to where I met you on the other shore."

"Good-night," and the stranger, walked away.

CHAPTER LII.

REINFORCED.

AFTER the departure of Little Rebel on his mission to the old Mormon fort, and from thence on to Fort Wingate, Lieutenant Ames felt better satisfied with his situation.

He was well fortified, had ample provisions for the present, plenty of ammunition for ordinary use, there was grass in plenty, even for the extra number put upon it in the Indian ponies, and his captives were beyond escape.

The water of the spring was an ample flow for all needs, and icy cold, and he was just in the place where he could be of most service to Buffalo Bill when needed.

It was the second day after the departure of Little Rebel when the sentinel at the mouth of the canyon reported a party of horsemen in sight.

Lieutenant Ames hastened to the spot and saw that the horsemen were a long distance off, and coming along under the shadows of the cliffs directly toward the canyon.

His glass soon revealed them distinctly and he called out:

"It is the sergeant's party from old Maroni. Little Rebel has made splendid time, if he can only keep up the same pace to Wingate."

Bony the scout also joined the lieutenant and recognizing the party at a glance said:

"Now, sir, we'll have eighteen good men and true, to stand off any attack, and we can do it."

"Yes, Bony, I feel better satisfied now, and at the pace that Little Rebel has started in to ride to Wingate he will have troops at Maroni and the Fatal Camp within eight days from his starting."

"Yes, sir, there is no more lightning rider than little Yankton, and he can stand anything any man can and has will and pluck to take him through."

"The grass will never grow over his trail before he gets back over it."

"Without excepting present company, Bony, I will say that Buffalo Bill has the pick of the plainsmen for his scouts."

"Well, you see, sir, he is a perfect scout, Indian-fighter and trailer himself."

"He knows just what a man should do under all circumstances, understands the lay of the land better than any one I ever saw, and never shirks work himself."

"So he picks his men for the work, drills them, trains them, puts them to the test, and will stand no nonsense on duty, while he is the best of chiefs and generous and kind to all—yes, sir, Buffalo Bill has no equal on this frontier, our men know it and try to emulate him, and it would break us all up if he has come to harm."

"Yet you scouts take his absence most coolly, Bony."

"Oh yes, sir, for there is not a mother's son of us but believes that Buffalo Bill will turn up all right, for he can get out of any danger he gets into, is our opinion."

"I only hope it will prove so, but I confess I am anxious about him, for that horse found corralled in the canyon shows that he met some one here, as the animal could not be there without his knowing it."

"That's so, Lieutenant Ames; but it is not the chief's horse, and the owner has not shown up for him."

"See, sir, they are coming on at a slapping gait."

The party were coming at a lively pace, and an hour after being seen by the sentinel they rode up to the barrier.

Lasso Lil was in the lead guiding the way, the sergeant and his soldiers came next, leading the pack-animals, and the scouts brought up the rear.

The little force of Lieutenant Ames was there to receive them with cheers which were answered with vim.

"Well, sergeant, I am glad to see you and your men."

"When did you leave Maroni?"

"Before dawn this morning, sir."

"You have pushed ahead lively indeed; but what of Yankton?"

The Little Rebel was off ahead of us, sir, for Wingate, with two of the best horses he could pick, and he knows a good animal when he sees one, so will ride into Wingate in great time, sir, barring accidents."

"I trust so, sergeant, but I'll place your men, and you'll find this a good camp and one we can defend against big odds."

"It looks it, sir, if they don't tumble stones down on top of us," and the sergeant glanced upward at the towering heights rising heavenward.

"That would be a bad way to attack us, sergeant, but I do not look for trouble from that quarter, as one of the scouts says there is no way of getting up there save by a pass through the canyon."

"Any word from Chief Cody, sir?"

"None, but we are watching and waiting for him to appear."

"I hope so, sir," and saluting his superior, the sergeant went on up to the camp near the springs, and to have a look at the Indian prisoners as well.

CHAPTER LIII.

AN UNSEEN MESSENGER.

THERE was at once an air of security upon all, after the coming of the sergeant's party to the canyon, though a feeling of suspense and anxiety in regard to the chief of scouts was shown upon every face.

The lone trail which Buffalo Bill had gone off on was so hazardous that all could understand that the chances against him were a hundred to one.

Had it been any one else they would have at once set him down as dead or a prisoner.

The fact that old Haphazard Harry had been entrapped was a proof that there were cunning, bold and bad men to circumvent in that country, men who, renegades themselves, had the Indians with them as allies, with all their cruelty and mercilessness.

The third day after the arrival of the sergeant and his men had passed, and though each day drew nearer the hope of succor being within call at Maroni and the Fatal Camp, as the men now all called the scene of the attack on Lord Mildmay's party, it yet added to the uncertainty and dread as to Buffalo Bill's fate.

Lasso Lil was suggesting to Lieutenant Ames that he had better go on the chief's trail, and Frank, Gerard, Bony and Ernest were equally anxious to do so, or to go in a party of three or five.

The Indian prisoners had seemed to arrive at a realization that escape was impossible, and so gave little trouble, and Lieutenant Ames was considering the advisability of allowing three of the scouts to go in search of Buffalo Bill, when, as they sat in camp one night, the third since the arrival of the Maroni force, there was suddenly heard a voice, as though coming from the clouds, shouting:

"Ho the camp!"

All started, and a thrill of horror ran through the hearts of those who were superstitious.

Was the Skeleton Scout to visit them, they wondered?

Was it that weird mystery that was hailing?

Then again came the voice, deep, stern and clear:

"Ho, the camp in the canyon!"

Lieutenant Ames was the first to collect himself, after such a sudden hail from the clouds, and responded promptly after the second hail:

"Ay, ay!"

"Who is it that hails?"

"A friend."

"You are you?"

"I am the unseen friend who was with you in your battle here."

"Ay, ay, glad to see you, or rather hear you, for you are out of sight."

"And must remain so."

"Can't you come down?"

"I could, for there is a trail up out of this canyon to the summit of the cliffs, though it is one few would care to travel."

"Then why not come down and join us?"

"I cannot do so, for it is not my wish; but I desire to serve you."

"You have done so, and I thank you; but what is the service you can render now?"

"You are anxious about one of your party?"

"Little Rebel the scout," cried Lieutenant Ames, his first thought falling upon his messenger.

"No, he is safe, for you sent him to the fort after reinforcements."

"You know this?"

"I saw him depart."

"Hal where were you?"

"Up in the clouds here."

"That pass will have to be guarded," said the officer impatiently.

"Not from a friend surely, and no enemy knows it."

"That is good news indeed; but do you allude to Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"You know him?"

"I have seen him," was the evasive reply.

"Where is he?"

"He has crossed the big river."

A groan went up from all at this, for it was at once thought that he was dead, they misinterpreting "across the big river."

"Buffalo Bill dead!" cried Lieutenant Ames in a tone of awe.

"No, no, you mistake me, and I see my mistake now—I meant that he had gone across the big Colorado River."

"Ah!" and a sigh of relief came from all at this news.

"How know you this?" continued Lieutenant Ames, resuming his questioning.

"I have seen him."

"Where?"

"He is in great danger."

"What! a prisoner?"

"No, but he has one who is his prisoner and whom he intends to trust to guide him, relying on his pledge to be faithful to him in return for his life."

"And he will betray him?"

"Yes, within two or three days, if he is not saved from the traitor he is compelled to put confidence in."

"What can I do to save him?" eagerly asked the lieutenant.

"Everything, for in this case I can do nothing, my hands being tied where his prisoner is concerned."

"Then how can you serve me?"

"I will guide you to him," was the prompt reply.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE RED LIGHT.

LIEUTENANT AMES could hardly restrain his men from a cheer, when the unseen friend from the cliffs said that he would guide him to Buffalo Bill.

"Silence, men!"

"You will have plenty of time to cheer when you have won this game," he said sternly.

Then he called out:

"Do you mean that you will guide me to where Buffalo Bill is in danger?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-morrow night."

"Must I go alone?"

"Oh no, your whole force must go."

"You know that I have some Indian prisoners?"

"Oh, yes, I aided them in deciding to surrender by rolling over a few rocks into the canyon, and sending a few bullets down."

"I did not wish to kill one, when I was out of all danger, so did as I say to scare them into making up their minds."

"And you did make them very quickly decide."

"I had an idea that was you and thank you."

"You are always welcome to anything I can do to serve you."

"Do you mean that I must take my Indians along?"

"Oh, yes, for they may be useful, if you should get into a tight place and need hostages."

"You are right and wise as well."

"I will take them."

"Do you know what my force is?"

"Yes, for you were reinforced from Fort Maroni by the sergeant and his party."

"You seem well posted?"

"It is my duty to keep so."

"You are a strange man, indeed; but now tell me what I am to do to rescue Buffalo Bill?"

"Make all your preparations to-morrow to leave here, going after dinner."

"You will reach the ridge over the ferry at nightfall, and there have supper, but light no fires."

"When it is dark you will see a red light hovering near your camp."

"A red light?"

"Yes, one that looks like a large eye of crimson."

"Well?"

"Get your men together to follow it, but have gags ready to put in the mouths of each one of your prisoners, whether wounded or not."

"Yes."

"It will not do to have one utter a war-cry there, or later on, so see that the gags fit well and cannot be gotten out."

"I will."

"Of course you will keep your Indians bound on the march, for they can ride, but keep their ponies tied together, or one may dash away, bound as he is, and escape, and that means the death of you all."

"I will be guided by just what you say."

"Follow the red light down the steep trail to the lower river-bank, and halt by the river."

"There you will see the red light crossing the river, but around a large willow growing there you will find a rope, so, when the light is swung once in a circle, draw on it, and it will bring back to you a boat."

"Crowding it, you can carry across seven at a time, so that six or seven loads will take all, and your horses can swim the stream to be caught on the other side as they come out."

"There is another boat near, but I dare not use it, for it belongs to one I do not care to see or be seen by, and my canoe will answer the purpose."

"You know best, sir."

"Once across, mount and follow the red light again, and it will guide you to a camp where Buffalo Bill and his prisoner are to be found, and you will find things as I have said, that though the man is in the scout's power, he is hurt and is only waiting to be able to travel, to lead your friend into a trap that will cost him his life."

"I believe you, and place confidence in all that you have to say," said Lieutenant Ames.

"Then remember, leave here after dinner to-morrow, and march to the cliffs overhanging the river and camp for supper."

"Then watch for the red light and follow it as I have directed you, and you will save your friend."

"Good-night!"

Without another word he must have departed, for though Lieutenant Ames called to him there came no reply.

All looked up at the ledge from whence the

voice had come, some two hundred feet above their heads, but all was dark and silent there.

"Well, Bony, what do you say to all this?"

"Don't fail to go, lieutenant," was the earnest response of the scout.

"And sergeant, what is your opinion?"

"You know best, sir, what to do, but if it was me that was in command I'd go, sir."

"What say you, corporal?"

"The same as does the sergeant, sir."

"And Lasso Lil?"

"I'm with you, sir, in anything to save the chief, and we must take all chances."

"So I have decided to do, men, and we start at the time our unseen friend set, and will follow the red light to the rescue of Buffalo Bill or to our own death," and those who knew the young officer well felt that he was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER LV.

THE MARCH TO THE COLORADO.

THE camp was all ready broken up when noon came, and after dinner the men began to make their prisoners mount and to bind them on their ponies.

There were several seriously wounded who were supported by comrades seated on the same horse with them, and to which they were bound.

That they suffered there was no doubt, but they could not be spared that under the circumstances.

Gags had been made and were ready for use when needed, and Lieutenant Ames hastily wrote that, which the reader has heard read by Surgeon Preston, and stuck it upon the rock where he had had his bed.

All being packed up and ready the order to march was given and the strange cavalcade moved out of the canyon.

First rode Lasso Lil and Bony, following the trail, and Lieutenant Ames came next, followed by the sergeant and six of his troopers.

Then came the prisoners, with a scout riding upon either side, and the corporal and two soldiers following with the pack-horses.

Bringing up the rear were five scouts, and they kept their eyes upon the Indian prisoners.

Shortly before sunset one of the most seriously wounded Indians died, and a halt was made to bury him.

He was wrapped in his blanket and laid in a shallow grave at the base of the cliff.

This death impressed the Indians greatly, they grew ugly in their mood, scowled at their captors and looked as though they would need but a spark to kindle a flame of mutiny that could not but give their foes trouble.

But Lieutenant Ames was not one to trifle with, and riding up to Flying Fox he said sternly, while he grasped hold of his scalp-lock:

"See here, chief, you understand perfectly what I say to you, so heed it."

"That Indian was dying when he left the camp, and there is another who will hardly live to the end of our ride, and neither could have recovered, though I admit that this ride may have shortened their lives a day or two and doubtless did; but if you do not curb the ugly humor your braves are in, I will scalp you myself, and have my men do a like service for each one of your band."

"Now what will you do?"

Had the lieutenant threatened to kill Flying Fox it could never have had the effect of frightening him as did that which he had said, for to scalp an Indian, and alive, was something too terrible for them to contemplate.

A scalped brave was not a candidate for the Happy Hunting Grounds, and would put him below a squaw.*

So the lieutenant's threat terrified Flying Fox into instant submission, and when he repeated to the others what had been said the effect was electrical.

From that moment the red-skins rode on in silence, ever and anon casting glances at Lieutenant Ames as though they regarded him with the greatest terror.

"You knew just where to hit them, sir, for they will never give you any more trouble," said Bony to the officer, as he rode again to his position behind his guides.

"As long as they think I would carry out such a diabolical threat it is just as well, so long as it served the purpose," assured the officer with a smile.

"I don't think you will even have to muzzle them after that threat, lieutenant," Lasso Lil remarked.

"I will muzzle them as you call it, all the same."

"Yes, sir, it will not do to take any chances."

The same steady gait was held on toward the river until the overhanging cliffs were reached, when just at sunset they came to the summit of the ridge.

There were a few cedars there, some patches of grass and a fair camping-place, so a halt was ordered and supper, a cold one, gotten ready.

The Indians were quiet but sullen, and had their eyes upon their other comrade, whose minutes of life were numbered.

Lieutenant Ames bent over the dying Indian but saw that nothing could be done for him, save moisten his lips with water from his canteen.

The comrades once or twice seemed about to break forth into their wild death-song for the life that was slipping away, but a look and stern word from the lieutenant checked them.

Not a brave was there who would touch a morsel to eat, and when a soldier remarked that it was a saving of rations Bony said:

"Don't you believe it, for they will more than make up for it to-morrow, if the lieutenant does not cut us all down to half rations."

Just as the sun went down behind the red cliffs, the dying Indian's life fluttered out of the body, and he fell back dead.

There was a suppressed moan from his comrades, which Lieutenant Ames had not the heart to check, and then he gave orders for the body to be wrapped in its blanket.

"We must carry it to the river and bury it there, for we have no time now."

"Wrap stones up securely in the blanket with the body, so it will sink at once to the bottom," ordered the officer, and the scouts quickly obeyed, and tied the body across the back of a horse.

"Now muzzle them all, Bony," came the next order, and for fifteen minutes there was a struggle, but the work was done, and the red-skins placed beyond giving alarm.

Just as the work was finished Lieutenant Ames said:

"There is the red light! Mount!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE MIDNIGHT TRAIL.

THE red light had appeared, and on time.

The Indians saw it as the whites did, and not knowing what it meant, regarded it with superstitious dread.

They seemed to connect it in some way with the departed spirit of their comrade, who had been missed back on the trail.

The light waned a little and the men mounted at the command of their officer, and stood ready to move.

All being ready the low command came:

"Forward, march!"

Lasso Lil and Bony were still ahead, their eyes fixed upon the red light that was leading them, and Lieutenant Ames followed close behind.

The Indians had all been bound to their ponies, as well as being gagged, but though they could not speak, or move, their eyes were following the red light ahead with strange eagerness, and an awed feeling at its appearance.

There was something very spooky, like unto the supernatural, this following of a red light along the heights of the cliff, and then down the dizzy and dangerous ledge along which the trail led.

The men so considered it, and in spite of their pluck several of them wished themselves well out of that country.

Even Lasso Lil and Bony became impressed by following the "Crimson Eye," as they called it, and often cast glances back at their officer to see how he considered it.

But Lieutenant Ames rode silent as a statue in his saddle, making no comment upon the following of a deadly trail by midnight, and the guide being a red light gliding through the darkness ahead, while in their midst were a number of bound and gagged Indian prisoners, and one dead form wrapped in its blanket and loaded down with rocks to sink it into the bottom of the swift-flowing and mysterious Colorado River.*

Down from the lofty ridge wound the red light, and boldly it was followed in all its devious turns along the perilous ledge that was the only trail to the lower banks of the river far down below.

After what seemed an age to the anxious followers of that crimson eye, the level bottom below was reached and it went straight across toward the fringe of willows that bordered the banks.

A wheel of the red light brought the party to a halt, and soon after came a signal to advance.

Then there was another circle of red, and advancing to the river-bank a search revealed, as the unknown guide had said, a rope about a willow tree.

Drawing upon it a boat came back, and frail as it seemed it was well loaded for the trip across.

When the scouts had gone across the Indians were taken in the next few loads; and this done, the horses were driven in, several being led by a soldier in the boat.

The animals swam the stream without hesitation and were caught as they reached shore on the opposite side.

Then the sergeant, Bony and two soldiers were ordered into the canoe, the latter carrying the form of the dead Indian.

Lieutenant Ames, in relating the circumstance to me, spoke of it as the weirdest, most awe-inspiring sight he had ever known, and which he even now recalls with a shudder.

—THE AUTHOR.

The lieutenant followed, and the two scouts plying the paddle they started across.

Just in mid river the boat stopped and the low command came:

"Lower the body into the water, men!"

"All ready, sir," said the sergeant.

"Let it sink!" commanded Lieutenant Ames, and the men released their hold and the body of the dead Indian sunk into the depths of the mighty Colorado.

Quickly across the river the scouts sent the canoe, and landing, the lieutenant sent it back for the corporal and his men, and the packs.

A few more trips and all were across in safety.

Eagerly the Indians watched each coming of the canoe to see the blanket-wrapped form of their dead companion.

But they watched in vain, and when the order was given to mount, there was again a disposition to give trouble in spite of their almost helpless condition, for they tried hard to stampede their ponies, all tied together as they were.

In the very instant of time Lieutenant Ames sprung into their midst, and grasping the long hair of Flying Fox swung his sword over his head, while the scouts crowded around also with their knives drawn.

Instantly the struggling Indians ceased their efforts to stampede the ponies, and they were at once guarded on each side by the soldiers and once more awed by the act of the daring young commander.

Meanwhile the red light was moving ahead and the order was given to march, and again the guides followed, their gaze fixed upon the Crimson Eye that was leading them.

CHAPTER LVII.

A DANGEROUS PRISONER.

It will now be well to return to Buffalo Bill, who had discovered, in returning to where he had left his prisoner, Gabe Gurney, to take him across the Colorado River, that a complete metamorphosis had taken place, and instead of his captive he discovered no less than the mysterious creature known as the Skeleton Scout in his place.

The prisoner was an unruly one from the start.

The tables had been so completely turned upon him by the scout, that he became as ugly in humor as he was in face.

So cleverly captured by his own prisoner, he had bitterly regretted not having shot the scout down from the outset.

But it was no use to repine over what might have been, and being in a tight place he could only do all in his power to extricate himself from the situation in which he then was, Buffalo Bill's prisoner and in danger of death at the end of a lariat as one suspected of crimes, and whose actions toward the scout had proven his evil intent.

He had, to save him from death, as he believed, made a pledge to make a clean breast of it and guide the scout to the place where Lord Mildmay and Old Harry were held prisoners.

But his promise was like the man, worthless, and he at once began to scheme to escape.

Under the plea that he suffered with a sprain in one wrist, he had asked the scout to tie the bonds less securely, and Buffalo Bill had humanely granted his request.

This was the opening wedge to the prisoner's plot to escape, and he at once began to attempt to free himself.

His weapons had of course been taken from him, but he had his belt on, and one edge of his buckle was broken, leaving a ragged edge.

With this he began to pick at the rope about the pretended sprained wrist, and after some time had loosened it so that he could slip his hand almost through.

The rough edge of the buckle also began to wear the rope, and he felt with delight that he could free himself if left alone for an hour or so, when he could work readily and without fear of detection.

The scout's going after the boat gave him this opportunity, and he at once began to work like a beaver to get free.

Still he found that Buffalo Bill, in spite of his humane treatment of him, had not been negligent in tying him, and it was no easy task to break loose from bondage.

He was gagged, also, as the scout had no desire, should there be any one near, to have him cry for help.

The man struggled at his bonds until the sweat rolled from his brow, and he gasped for breath, almost strangled by the gag.

He knew that the scout had to go a certain distance, that to swim across the river was a Herculean task, and then he had to row back again and come after him.

This would all take time, but he needed every minute of it.

He at last got his one wrist free, and at once began to loosen the knots on the other.

It tried his patience to the utmost, but after considerable time he was able to free his other hand.

His first work then was to untie the rope about his neck and remove the gag from his mouth.

* A brave who has lost his scalp is not thought to be worthy of going to the Happy Hunting Grounds.—THE AUTHOR.

It was again a struggle with one of the scout's well-tied knots.

But he was working for freedom, perhaps for life, and he exerted himself to the utmost.

At last he removed the gag from his mouth and drew a full breath of relief.

He had never before known what it was to be gagged and then freed of it.

But dry as his throat was he lost no time in giving thanks for his freedom thus far, or in trying to find a canteen to drink some water, for he had to yet get the bonds about his ankles free.

To do this he had both hands now to work with, but suddenly he stopped in his work, for he thought he heard the step of the scout, his foot having snapped a dry twig.

Instantly he rose to a standing position and stood like a statue, in the attitude of listening.

Again there came the snapping of a dry stick, and he felt sure that another minute would bring the scout upon him, and suddenly he cried:

"I'll try it, for it is my only chance!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

A STRUGGLE FOR MASTERY.

BUFFALO BILL has a trend as light as a panther's, his long life of danger having given him a walk similar to that of an Indian, his feet rising and falling lightly.

But in his return, twice he stepped upon a dry stick that snapped under his feet like the popping of a cap.

He was walking hurriedly or would have been more careful, but he was anxious to get to a secure hiding-place before day dawned.

It was these snapping of the twigs that gave the prisoner evidence of his return, and a moment after when he came to the little temporary camp, he suddenly confronted, the reader will remember, no less a personage than the Skeleton Scout.

There, standing where the new moon, nearing the horizon, peered through the trees and revealed the spectral form, stood the Skeleton Scout.

There was no mistaking the white ribs, the snowy skull and bony figure seen before by the scout.

He had left his prisoner there, and in his stead he found that strange form.

The arms were waving him back, and it looked startling enough to have unnerved a man who had a less brave heart than Buffalo Bill.

The scout stood undecided a moment. His hand rested upon the butt of his revolver, and yet the thought came to him how strange it would seem firing upon a figure of death.

Then too came the reflection that a shot there might cost him his life.

The long, bony arms still waved him back, and the head moved ominously from side to side.

In spite of all Buffalo Bill never for once believed that he had to deal with the supernatural.

He did believe however that his prisoner had been set free by the spectral figure, or that he had come there to accomplish it.

Not seeing his prisoner, he supposed that he had returned before he could be set free.

So the scout suddenly decided to try strategy. He would see what effect that would have and the aid it would afford him.

All this time, and yet it was not the quarter of a minute, for thoughts fly fast when danger confronts one, he had stood like a man dazed at what he beheld.

But suddenly he put out his hands as though to ward off the specter and cried in a faint, quivering voice:

"Back! for the love of heaven, do not haunt me!"

Hardly had the words left his lips when the scout staggered back and fell his length upon the ground.

"Fainted from fright, by heaven!"

"Now I take no chances and his life is mine!" cried a deep voice in exultation, and with a few jumps, not walking, the Skeleton Scout reached the side of the fallen scout.

"Yes, with his own knife will I kill him," came in vicious tones as he bent over him to take the knife from his belt.

But a cry of horror escaped his lips to suddenly find himself in the iron grip of the scout.

The Skeleton Scout was a large and powerful man, but he found that he had met his match in strength.

"I don't faint from fright so easily as you believe, Old Death's Head, so now we will have it, for I intend to capture a ghost alive," came the words of Buffalo Bill as the two struggled together.

Determined to make it a trial of strength and pluck, Buffalo Bill had unbuckled his belt of arms and dropped it.

So it was that it was a fight for mastery.

The man he had engaged in savage struggle was striving for life, he well knew, and he fought like a demon.

His blows were heavy, yet the scout avoided receiving them in the face and strove hard to get his grip upon the throat of his antagonist.

Like giants they fought for the mastery, and

the strength and iron nerve of Buffalo Bill never served him to better advantage, for he felt that he had met one of uncommon strength and activity.

Now down on the ground, now upon their knees, then standing, they fought like Roman wrestlers and modern pugilists combined, the scout's foe striving hard to reach the belt of arms lying near.

But finding that he could not get the clutch on the man's throat he hoped for, Buffalo Bill determined to end the struggle in another way, so delivered a telling blow in his adversary's face.

This he followed with another, and then getting his grip upon the throat his foe fell back seemingly unconscious.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SKELETON CAPTIVE.

"WELL, here is a pretty pickle," said Buffalo Bill, still panting from his severe struggle, as he arose from having bound his prisoner once more securely, and placed the gag in his mouth.

"I have a captive skeleton, and the still bound feet tell me plainly who the Skeleton Scout is.

"I thought it was a funny hop for a skeleton to give, when he came toward me, after I pretended to swoon away.

"It looked like a ghost with the rheumatism.

"Well, there is no doubt about his being unconscious, for I gave him several terrible blows, ending up with a good choking.

"I will carry the traps over to the boat and then return for him, for this is no place to remain in daylight.

"I must hunt a hiding-place."

Turning he took up a canteen, removed the gag from the man's mouth, and poured a swallow of water into it, then throwing more over his face and neck.

In a minute or two the chest heaved violently, the eyes opened, and the man said faintly:

"Where am I?"

"That's the same old gag, where am I?"

"Why, you are not in your grave, or a doctor's shop, the only place where skeletons should feel at home, but on the banks of the Colorado River with your dear friend Buffalo Bill for a wet nurse—see, I am drenching you with water."

"I am badly hurt, do you know it?" gasped the man.

"No, but I do know you are the liveliest skeleton I ever knew of."

"I tell you I am badly hurt."

"Where?"

"I feel as though my collar-bone was broken, and one of my legs is badly wrenched, for they were tied, you know."

"Yes, I do know, and I am glad they were, for you were too lively a corpse as it was to suit me."

"Take me to my camp, please."

"What family have you there to welcome me?"

"Not a soul."

"I thought you were to guide me to the retreat of your pards?"

"I will do that when I am able, but now take me to my own camp, where I live all alone."

"I'll go you this once, and if you should not live alone, you will be the first one I kill."

"You will have to carry me, for I cannot walk."

"I have carried better men in my time, never worse," and the scout bent over, aided his prisoner to rise, and then shouldered him.

"Lordy! no man ever carried such a load of sin, since Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress, I read about when I was a boy," said the scout, and he went on with his burden to the river-bank.

Then he laid the man in the boat and returned for his traps, when, getting in himself he seized the paddle and asked quietly:

"Which way, my Skeleton Pilot?"

"Up the stream and over toward the other shore."

"I'll go up the stream, but over toward this shore, for you may have friends camped on the bank opposite, who might bring my ship to."

"I have no friends there, and this shore is dangerous, with its whirlpools and sunken rocks."

"I'll chance it, for I can see where it is too dangerous to push on, and will then cross over."

"I warn you."

"All right, I'll go just the opposite to what you say," and the scout kept toward the right-hand shore.

Up the stream he paddled for a mile when the man said faintly:

"Cross over, or you will pass my camp."

"Where is it?"

"Up a canyon on the other shore."

"How far from the river?"

"Not a great distance."

"Who is there?"

"No one."

"How do you live?"

"I have a small cabin there."

"Is there no place to mark your landing?"

"Yes, a small stream into which you can run your boat."

"All right, now open your mouth for the gag."

"Don't gag me."

"I will."

"I'll keep quiet."

"I won't trust you."

"I'll resist and that will upset the boat."

"You being bound will go to the bottom, while I escape."

The man groaned and Buffalo Bill forced the gag into his mouth, resumed his paddle, and, after going some distance further up the stream started across.

He was not to be entrapped again, so landing, went on foot down along the shore.

He came to the stream, found the canyon and went up it for some little distance when he came to a small cabin.

The door was closed and fastened on the outside.

"I guess he does live alone, so I will chance it," and with this the scout returned to the boat, shouldered his prisoner and bore him to the cabin.

Returning for the packs he carried them up also, and then lighting a match looked about him.

CHAPTER LX.

THE LONE CABIN.

BUFFALO BILL in glancing about him, by the light of the match, beheld a pile of wood in one corner, and he quickly built a fire upon the hearth, and soon had a bright blaze.

The cabin was small, there was but one bunk in it, and one rudely-made chair, so this appeared as though the prisoner did dwell there alone.

Having looked about him thoroughly, Buffalo Bill removed the gag from the prisoner's mouth, who then begged to have his ankles unbound, as he suffered much in one leg.

The scout hesitated, and as he did so he beheld hanging on a peg in the logs, half a dozen iron handcuffs connected with chains, a foot or more in length.

"Ah! just what I want."

"It strikes me that you must be the sheriff of this district, my friend," and taking down a couple of pair of the irons the scout examined the clasps and turned toward the prisoner, who cried:

"For Heaven's sake don't put those on me," and he shuddered.

"They are better than the ropes, for the latter cause your limbs to swell, from being drawn so tight."

"Yes, these will be just the thing."

Unbinding the ropes he soon had his prisoner securely ironed, the man crying out with pain when his left leg was moved, and stating that he also suffered with his broken collar bone.

"I can set that for you, as I have often seen my pard, Surgeon Frank Powell of the army, set collar bones and limbs, and helped him too, while I have some knowledge of wounds, so can fix you up in fine shape."

The scout then set to work to examine the collar bone and found that it had received a slight fracture.

After some difficulty he set it, giving the man relief, and bandaged it as well as he could with lint he took from his pack.

The leg the man said now gave him the most pain, and the scout could give him no relief with it, so said:

"You'll have to grin and bear it, pard, but I think in a day or two it will be all right."

"I hope so, for I have had enough of this and intend to now make a clean breast of it."

"You will be wise to do so; but what a beauty you look in that masquerading suit."

"I don't wonder you scare people by night when you look so horribly by the firelight," and the scout gazed fixedly at his prisoner.

He did indeed present a terrible appearance, for he was dressed in a tight-fitting suit of black upon which was painted the white ribs and bones of a skeleton.

Over his head he had drawn a skull mask, and this had in a measure protected him in his struggle with the scout, but but now hung limp and torn about his neck.

Wearing the suit under his clothes, and carrying the mask with him, he was able to quickly disrobe himself and be metamorphosed into a skeleton.

On account of his legs being bound he had been unable to get his pants off, so had just had time to let them fall when the scout appeared, so that they had been torn into ribbons in the struggle.

With the irons upon his ankles and wrists he could move more readily and they gave him no pain, such as the tight ropes had, yet he seemed to have preferred to be bound than ironed, for some reason known to himself.

The scout gazed at the man in wonder, for full a minute, and then said:

"As you intend to make a clean breast of it, though I believe you are still tricky, tell me what you mean by this deathly masquerading?"

"Pard, I'll tell you the truth, so you will understand that you can now trust me, for I have had all I want."

"You are master, and I will obey, only I beg"

for my life and freedom when you know the truth and appeal to you to save me from those who will kill me when they know I am a traitor."

"I will protect you."

"But can you?"

"Oh yes, for I did not come up here alone, you may rest assured."

"Then I'll trust you and tell you that I am one of a band who came to this country to find gold."

"I expected that."

"We did find it, and my comrades are now working at their leads, which are together, while mine is here, up this canyon, and not one of my men know where I am."

"Then you are chief?"

"I am the chief."

"And you masquerade for what purpose?"

"To frighten others out of the country, for, by haunting the trails I have done so."

"Poor fools, to be frightened at what they must know cannot be—a ghost," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE GOLD-HUNTER'S CONFESSION.

"WELL, Gurney, as you seem to be suffering greatly to-night, I will not disturb you now, but wait until to-morrow."

"You will sleep then before the fire?"

"Oh, no, I'll sleep outside and keep watch, for you might have a visitor, you know, and I would like to see him before he does me."

With this Buffalo Bill took up his traps and left the cabin.

He went off a few paces in the timber, spread his blankets at the foot of a large pine and lay down to rest, for he was very much fatigued with all he had undergone in the last day and night.

He was soon fast asleep, and yet slept with an ear open, if not like Napoleon with one eye.

The east was growing gray when he awoke, and going down to the river he plunged in for a bath, which greatly refreshed him.

He tied the boat among the willows, then returned to the cabin up the canyon.

The sun had risen and the scene was a grand one, there in the wilds of the Colorado.

There was a trail leading to the cabin, but so lightly marked as to show that it was little traveled.

Entering the cabin, yet listening a moment before doing so and hearing the prisoner groaning with pain, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, Gurney, how are you feeling this morning?"

"Sore from my struggle with you, for I never before met a man who could handle me, Buffalo Bill."

"You are a giant in strength and as agile as a panther."

"You are a pretty good one yourself, Gurney; but how is the collar bone?"

"All right, I guess, for it gives me no more trouble than I feel from the bandages; but my leg is intensely painful."

"I will have a look at it."

This the scout did, and all he could make out of the examination was that the limb had been badly wrenched in the struggle.

"It will soon be O. K., Gurney, and I hope in a day or two, for I am anxious to have you guide me to the retreat of your fellows."

"Why are you anxious to go there?"

"Because I believe they hold Lord Mildmay and Old Harry prisoners there, for you would never allow the Indians to take such valuable captives to their camp, whatever you might do with the balance of the Englishman's party."

"Why hold him?"

"For ransom, as you well know."

"Well, Buffalo Bill, you certainly have a very direct way of getting at bottom facts, for that is just it; but I'll tell the whole story after awhile."

The scout said nothing more then, but took another look around the cabin and then started to work getting breakfast.

He drew upon the stock of provisions found in the cabin, and there was a good supply he noticed.

He also observed that there were a number of things in the cabin that gave it the look of being the home of one who raided upon his fellow beings for a living.

When the meal was over, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Gurney, I want no nonsense, but an unvarnished tale of who and what you are, for remember, I give you your life whatever may be the fate of your comrades."

"And no gold?"

"I told you that before—not a dollar—and you are lucky to get off with your life."

"All right, I'll consider it so and tell you all."

"You should consider it so when you sought to kill me, and I heard your words when you thought I was unconscious."

"Now, sir, your confession"

"It is soon made, for, anxious as gold-hunters, to keep others out of this country, and finding that the Skeleton Scout himself did not always have the desired effect, we became

allied with the Indians to drive back bands of invaders."

"And were successful in several cases?"

"Oh, yes, they would turn back when they came to find out that they would be constantly hounded by Indians, and were not sure that there was any gold here after all."

"And you wiped out several bands that would not turn back?"

"The Indians did."

"And you reaped the benefit?"

"About that."

"Now what force have you?"

"Of Indians?"

"Yes."

"The Chief Flying Fox is our ally."

"What does his force number?"

"He has three bands, from fifty to seventy-five warriors in each, and there is a white chief of our band with each one of these bands."

"I see; but now what number of white renegades have you with you?"

"About a dozen," was the reply.

"Don't you know?"

"Well, there are three with the Indians, as I said, and there are nine in the Miners' Retreat, who, with myself make thirteen."

"An unlucky number they'll find in this case; but I supposed there were more."

"There were more."

"What has become of them?"

"Six have mysteriously disappeared, been killed, I am certain, for there is an avenger on our track I am sure."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know."

"But he is avenging some wrong done him by your band?"

"Yes, it would seem so, for six have been killed within the last three years, and some of our men have seen this unknown avenger but could never track him down."

CHAPTER LXII.

AN UNKNOWN AVENGER.

BUFFALO BILL had been deeply interested in the story of the prisoner, for he could not be otherwise.

It had amounted to a confession, and there was no more doubt of his being a renegade, allying himself with Indians to keep his fellow-men out of a country where he had evidently found gold in paying quantities.

He had put his cabin apart from the others for some reason, and dwelt alone; but he was the one to be the scout's guide to the retreat of the others and then Buffalo Bill felt certain that he would find Old Harry and Lord Mildmay prisoners, the latter held for ransom.

But who this strange avenger was also interested the scout.

He was anxious to know about him, and asked:

"How does this avenger live?"

"No one knows."

"Nor where he lives?"

"That is also unknown."

"You say he has killed six of your men?"

"Yes, shot them upon the trail, in the camp, even, and one in his mine while at work, and he always sends a bullet into the brain."

"He is a good shot."

"Oh, yes."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"I have seen him, but not near enough to speak with him."

"Several times he could have killed me, for I have been near them whom he has shot."

"But he spares you?"

"Yes, for some purpose."

"Sometimes one keeps the best things for the last, and he may be intending to have a picnic with you in the end."

"It may be, but under present circumstances I'll disappoint him."

"But let me tell you one strange thing about this avenger?"

"Well?"

"He seems to have all his men picked out."

"How is that?"

"I'll tell you."

"Three years ago there started out here a band of gold-hunters."

"There were nine of them in the party, but eight of them were really my men, who inveigled one into coming, somehow having heard that he was a very rich man."

"He joined their party, believing they were gold-hunters, for that is the way we have now and then caught a man who was rich, and made him pay big money to go free, and also the men have joined a *bona fide* outfit, and led them into a trap for the Indians to finish up."

"I see."

"But the man I speak of was brought by the eight men into this country, for it was discovered that he had a map of a secret mine, given him by one whom he had befriended, and who in dying willed it to him."

"Of course he was allowed to go first to the place, following the direction of the map he had, and he alone had the directions."

"The mine panned out well, and so the men determined to get double money out of him, making him pay ransom as well."

"And then kill him?"

"Oh, yes," was the cool reply.

"Well?"

"They confined him in a cave we have in the cliff, overhauling the river."

"We lower ourselves from the top of the cliff, fifty feet and land on the edge fronting the cave."

"There all booty is kept that belongs to the whole band, and it is a safe place."

"A prisoner put there has either to stay, or jump off into the river, just five hundred feet below."

"I see; but they never jump."

"That man did, for he became desperate, refused to eat the food the man took down to him, for one of the band was lowered each day with his meals, and one night he leaped off into the Colorado."

"Poor fellow."

"He wrote a note with a pencil stating that he died to thwart us, and I still have the slip of paper he left, while these manacles you put on me he wore for several months before we put him in the cave, for there he did not need irons."

"And who was this man whom you drove to suicide?"

"I'll tell you one thing about him, and that was, when I was in Roton one night I saved his life when a desperado would have shot him in the back."

"He seemed very grateful for my act, and when I afterward discovered that he was the man that my spies had brought in, I hid from him, keeping out of his sight, for I did not care to have him know me as I really was."

"And your men did the work?"

"Yes, and it may be a fatality attending those men, or it may be an accident, but six of the eight are the ones the unknown avenger has killed."

"That is strange; it may be some friend of his who is avenging him."

"That is what I have thought."

"But who is this man?"

"That is a secret I will not betray, but keep it to myself," was the determined response.

CHAPTER LXIII.

TWO SPIES.

BUFFALO BILL smiled at the prisoner's refusal to betray who his victim had been, and said:

"It does not matter, for as he is dead I feel no interest in the case other than to hope that this unknown avenger will make no mistake but kill the last one of those cut-throats."

"All right, my interest ceases in them now; but tell me, what is it you wish for me to do?"

"Guide me to the retreat of your band for sure."

"Granted, I will do that."

"Then take me along the trail that will lead me to the village of this red ally of yours, Flying Fox."

"I can do that, but—"

"But what?"

"You surely do not intend to attack my retreat single-handed?"

"Oh, no, I was born with ordinary sense."

"What will you do?"

"When I know the retreat, and the Indian village, I will return to my comrades, so that when the attack is made there will be no escape for any of them."

"And what will you do with me?"

"When I am satisfied that you have been square with me, I will take you to camp and have you closely guarded until your band is in my power and your Indian allies have been given a very severe lesson."

"Then you will set me free?"

"When we return to the settlements, yes, but if you are ever seen on this frontier again, from the Gulf to Canada, I'll see that you are hanged."

"Why will you not leave me here, for I wish to pass my days in this wild land?"

"Yes, and get another band within the year and be playing the same red game over again."

"I'll pledge you my word, never!"

"I would not take your word, and I tell you I will do as I say, so that will end it."

"I can refuse to guide you."

"Just do so, and I'll take you to camp at once and give you to my scouts to deal with."

"I am not able to ride."

"Oh, never mind your leg, for death will heal bruises," was the very significant reply of Buffalo Bill.

"I can but yield, for I am in your power; but I wish to remain here."

"You will not, and that settles it."

"Now to-morrow you can go with me?"

"You know that I could not put my foot to the ground."

"You have very fine horses corralled up the canyon in a natural pasture."

"But I cannot ride yet."

"When will you be able?"

"Say within three days."

"I do not wish to be cruel, so will give you the three days, though it will delay me greatly and perhaps cost me my life."

"There are those anxiously awaiting my re-

turn, but I'll give you the three days and then go you must."

"I'll go then, cost me what it may in pain, for I am more hurt than you may believe."

"It may be so."

"Now one more question."

"All right, as many as you please."

"You have seen your prisoners lately captured?"

"Yes."

"How many were there?"

"There are two now."

"Who are they?"

"Lord Mildmay of England and a plainsman, Old Harry Haphazard."

"Where are the others?"

"There were but two others."

"There were seven in the Mildmay party."

"Yes."

"Were any your men?"

"You have guessed it."

"Ahl your men had led them into a trap?"

"I might as well confess it all."

"How many men had you along?"

"Two."

"Who were they?"

"One is known as Texas Tip, the other as Mexican Joe."

"The others were true to Lord Mildmay?"

"Yes, three of them, with the Englishman and Old Harry."

"They fought like demons, and only surrendered when they were unable to fire another shot."

"Why that Englishman and Old Harry alone killed half a dozen men each, and one of my renegade chiefs as well."

"And then a game was planned to disfigure the bodies and let the dead be thought to be Lord Mildmay and his party?"

"Yes, wasn't it clever?"

"Very, but there are games and games, as you clever men will find out, and I regret to say that you cannot on account of my pledge."

"But Lord Mildmay and Old Harry are the only ones in your retreat?"

"Yes."

"The other faithful ones were killed?"

"Yes."

"And your two friends, Mexican Joe and Texas Tip?"

"Are at the retreat."

"Are Lord Mildmay and Old Harry seriously wounded?"

"Not seriously."

"All right, you know my terms and I believe now, when you cannot help it, you intend to act square."

"Beware if you do not," and the scout left the cabin.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ON THE WATCH.

Of course Buffalo Bill understood that the desire of the man to save himself from being hanged might make him act squarely with him, sacrificing his comrades to save himself, and yet he did not trust him in the least.

Suffering as was Gurney with his leg, the scout was not one to force him to ride to the retreat, and upon the trail to the Indian cabin until he could do so without the terrible pain he complained of in his hip.

So he decided to give the man several days to get better, while he, with his prisoner ironed and safe, could scout around himself and see what he could find out.

He felt conscious that Gurney did live there alone, and kept his retreat hidden from his companions for reasons he understood best himself, so he had no fear of any one coming there.

The situation of the cabin, its approach, its being in what was a blind canyon, for no one would suspect its being there, no trail leading to it and the prisoner making his trips to it and from it by water, convinced the scout that the little retreat was unknown to others.

So it was that he felt security in leaving the man, when he had securely locked the door on the outside, and left him ironed hands and feet, while his leg was in too painful a plight for him to touch it to the ground.

So the scout went out and caught a fine mess of fish from the river and brought down a young mountain sheep with his rifle.

When he returned late in the day he found his prisoner secure, just as he had left him.

That night the two enjoyed a good dinner, the cook being Buffalo Bill himself, and few better are to be found, I may remark just here.

Retiring early, the scout was up early the next morning, and the two had a talk together before he once more started out on a short scouting expedition.

The scout very ingeniously turned the conversation upon the retreat of the band, its distance from the cabin and direction, and he thus picked up considerable information, which he could act upon in case anything should happen to his prisoner to prevent his carrying out his pledge.

He also learned all he could about the location of the village of Flying Fox, the number of Indians in it, and the trails they would have to follow to get there.

To such a man as Buffalo Bill, who could read

a country as a book, this information was invaluable and he found himself mentally making wagers with himself that he could go to both the retreat of the band and the Indian village.

Deciding to start upon another little run for observation he again saw to the security of his prisoner and left the cabin, his rifle on his shoulder and fishing-rod in hand.

Had he had reason to suspect the presence of any one near he would have been more cautious, would have taken a search about the cabin before leaving it.

But unsuspecting he walked away and did not see a form crouching in a thicket a few yards from the cabin, and one that had run there and hidden when he had heard him leaving the place, but who, a moment before had been standing at the rear of the hut listening to all that was said inside.

The moment that the scout got out of sight the eavesdropper returned to the side of the cabin, peered in for a few minutes through a hole and seemed surprised at what he saw.

Then he set off at a quick walk down the canyon, and appeared to be bent on some mission of importance.

Going up among the rocky ledges of the cliffs he soon descended bearing a canoe upon his shoulders, and launching this he paddled rapidly across the river to the other shore.

Landing, he drew his canoe out of the water and carrying it to the cliffs securely hid it in a crevice.

Then he set off on foot up the steep cliff trail, and reaching the summit held on at the same vigorous pace he had kept from the landing.

He was making a circuit, it seemed, and following the higher ridges of cliffs around toward the lofty summits of the range in which was the Navaho Springs Canyon.

It was just sunset when he reached the loftiest height above the canyon, but without resting he began the descent of the same dangerous mountain sheep trail which Buffalo Bill had taken in going into the canyon.

It was dark when he reached a spur overhanging the camp of Lieutenant Ames in the canyon, and soon after his voice rung out in a loud hail as though from the clouds, which momentarily startled both soldiers and scouts alike.

What that voice meant the reader already knows, and that it was upon the following night that Lieutenant Robert Ames and his men boldly followed the red light that guided them through the darkness and danger of an unknown trail.

That the mysterious man, bearing the red light ahead as a beacon, led them unerringly to the cabin of the outlaw in the canyon across the Colorado has been already seen, as well as that upon their arrival there they found the scout gone and the cabin deserted.

CHAPTER LXV.

TWO SHOTS.

THE next mornin' Buffalo Bill arose, as was his wont, at an early hour, and said:

"See here, Gurney, your leg does not seem to improve fast, so we'll start on that trail to-morrow morning bright and early, for my time is valuable just now."

"I cannot go for some days yet, Buffalo Bill," was the sullen reply.

"Well, we'll see to-morrow how you are."

"Now I am going off after some game and fish," and the scout left the cabin.

He walked down the canyon, put away his fishing-rod, and made a circuit back toward the cabin, keeping well in the timber.

Approaching the cabin cautiously he went to the rear and placed his eye to a peep hole, the existence of which he seemed to have already discovered.

What he beheld within, as in the case of the one who had looked through it the day before, appeared to surprise him.

He smiled grimly, retreated cautiously and approached the cabin from the front door with a firm heart.

He carried in his hand a stick, and taking off his jacket he hung it on one end and placed his gray sombrero above it.

Then he unlocked the door from the outside, half shoved it open, revealing his coat and hat.

Instantly a sharp report followed from within the cabin, and the bullet cut through the scout's hat.

With a vicious kick Buffalo Bill drove the door wide open and it revealed the prisoner standing at one side, with a revolver in one of his manacled hands, and which weapon he had just fired, the moment he saw the gray sombrero and coat.

But it was Buffalo Bill's time now, and his revolver flashed just as the prisoner with horror saw how he had been outwitted.

Down fell Gabe Gurney upon the cabin floor, the words breaking from his lips:

"My God, at last!

"Buffalo Bill you have killed me."

"That is what I aimed to do, Gurney, for you are as treacherous as a snake."

"I watched you, after I left the cabin and saw you get out of bed without one atom of pain, and hobble across this floor."

"I saw you take a revolver from its hiding-place, so well concealed that I could not find it, and your actions told me how I was to be welcomed upon my return."

"Well, I came, you had your shot, and I had mine."

"Now do you wish to atone for the past life you have led by doing some good?"

"How in God's name can I?" eagerly gasped the dying man.

"Tell me just how to reach the retreat of your men and the village of Flying Fox."

"I will, I will."

"Talk quick, for I do not believe you have long to live."

"I know that I have not, and oh! what a guilty wretch have I been through life."

"Then atone all in your power now, while there is time, and tell me how to end the evil career of others, and rescue Lord Mildmay and Old Harry."

"Go to the crossing of the river, take the canyon to the right, follow it to its head, and when you reach the red cliffs you will see a large rock, balancing on the end, having fallen there."

"Pass around it and you will find a chasm, a split in the cliff, and it will lead you to the camp upon the summit, and overhanging the river."

"The cave I told you of and the prisoners are there."

"And the village of Flying Fox?"

"Is—is—"

The man could say no more, for his face took on the pallor of death, and gasping painfully for breath, he clasped his manacled hands above his head, half rose to his feet in agony, and fell back dead.

Buffalo Bill was visibly affected by the terrible death of the man who had died by his bullet, and murmured several times:

"He brought it upon himself."

For a few minutes he stood in silence after the outlaw had breathed his last, and then he bent over the body, straightened out the limbs, and taking a blanket, wrapped it up securely, binding it around with a lasso.

In the cabin was a pick and shovel, the tools of a miner, and with them Buffalo Bill started up the canyon to dig a grave.

He selected a spot under the spur of a cliff some fifty feet in height, and set to work with a will.

The ground was hard in the canyon, but Buffalo Bill was a good worker and toiled on untiringly until the grave was finished.

Then he went to the cabin, and returning with the body, laid it gently in the grave.

Hardly had he done so, and was taking the shovel to fill up the grave, when a voice over his head startled him with the query:

"In ther undertakin' biz, pard?"

CHAPTER LXVI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR MEETING.

WHEN Buffalo Bill glanced up to see who had spoken, his eyes looked along the barrel of his revolver.

But his finger did not pull trigger, for the glance revealed a face well known to him, and he cried:

"Old Harry, as I live!"

"You bet I be, pard."

"What are you doing up there?"

"Been watchin' you fer a long time, afeerd ter speak, fer yer might put me ter work and thet ground is all-fired hard."

"Well, Harry, we'll work together, for I was looking for you."

"Me, too."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yas, for I know'd yer ter be on our trail."

"Come down here."

"Can't do it."

"Why?"

"Can't fly."

"Oh! then I'll come up there."

"You hain't got wings nuther."

"I'll find a way."

"No yer won't, for I has been lookin' for one half a day ter see who lived in that cabin yonder."

"The man in this grave."

"Died sudden I s'pose?"

"I killed him."

"Thought so."

"Who were he?"

"The Skeleton Scout."

"Ther devill."

"Why, he are ther chief of ther Gold Hunter band that roped us in."

"I know it; but where is Lord Mildmay?"

"Safe and sound in his prison cave."

"But you got away?"

"You bet I don't linger when it is better livin' outside."

"I congratulate you, old man."

"Thar's need of it; but they left tha'r rope ladder danglin' down one night within reach, for we was in a cave in ther side o' a cliff, and I jist got up on Lord Mildmay's shoulders and clum up ter reconnoiter."

"He were to remain, and play I was sick over in ther back of ther grave, while I went

on ther trail ter look you up, for I jist know'd you was a-lookin' for us, Billy.

"I happened onter a ranch in ther side o' a cliff that belonged to a gent o' the same persuasion as them what had us, and I were makin' myself at home thar when he come in and seen me.

"Waal, we had it rough and tumble, and I jist finished buryin' him this mornin' and then come on a scout in this direction.

"Billy, I is glad to see you."

"And I am to see you, old man."

"I'll go and get a couple of lariats and throw them up to you, so you can come down."

"Get 'em, and then you come up, for we'll go to my ranch, and from that we can strike ther trail for ther retreat, if you has men enough with yer ter wipe out half a score o' hon'ry rascals."

"I can get them in a couple of days, old man."

"That will do, for ther hain't no big hurry, now we has found each other; but don't let me interrupt yer funeral, for it hain't showin' ther proper respect."

"All right, I'll fill in the grave, lock up the cabin and join you."

The scout then went rapidly to work, filled in the grave and going down to the cabin got together some provisions, took a couple of lariats and walked back up the canyon.

By a dextrous throw he tossed the lariats up to the old plainsman, who soon made them fast to a cedar tree, and called out:

"Send up your traps first, Billy."

This Buffalo Bill did, and then hand over hand, with the dexterity of a sailor, he climbed up the lariat and reached the top of the cliff.

The hands of the two pards were then warmly clasped, and shouldering their traps they struck off further in among the rocks.

It was a hard trail the old man led the scout, but at last he turned into a crevice of the rocks, and it ended in a cavern which had evidently long been used as the house of some miner.

There were a pair of revolvers hanging upon a peg in the rocky wall, a saddle and bridle, and a number of other things scattered about, a blanket bed being in one corner.

This Buffalo Bill saw by the light of a fire which Old Harry hastily kindled with the remark:

"We'll eat supper first, Bill, and talk arterwards, for its better."

He hustled about as though perfectly at home, put some coffee on to boil and some venison into the fryingpan.

Then the two ate supper as soon as it was ready, after which, holding their tin cups full of hot coffee in ther hands, Buffalo Bill and Old Harry began to discuss all that had taken place since they parted at the little town in New Mexico, the old plainsman telling his story of the treachery of the men engaged for Lord Mildmay's expedition, and which had ended, after a desperate fight, in the capture of the nobleman and himself.

"Yes, Bill, it was hard, awful hard on us, but retribution will come now you are on the trail with me."

"That English lord is a dandy ter fight, but all we could do was ter let 'em hev ther way, arter he got wounded, as I did also, but not bad."

"Now, Bill, we holds ther trump keords, and ther game is in our hands," and Old Harry laughed with delight at the turn in his affairs.

CHAPTER LXVII.

IN DOUBT.

WHEN the lone cabin in the canyon was discovered to be deserted, Lieutenant Ames hardly knew what to do.

There was nothing to be done however but await until the day dawned, and then a thorough search was made of the cabin and the canyon.

Blood had been found on the floor, and the door was locked on the outside.

Going up the canyon the new made grave was discovered and Lieutenant Ames said quickly:

"Open it, and the body within will tell the story."

With willing hands the men set to work, and all stood by with pallid faces awaiting the result.

The shovels at last touched the blanket-infolded form, and it was hastily dragged out from its clayey bed.

A perfect yell of joy went up, as it was discovered not to be the dead body of Buffalo Bill, for the size of the man caused all to fear that they were about to look upon the handsome face of the chief of scouts.

"That tells the story, men."

"Buffalo Bill has outwitted his enemy, killed him and has gone."

"Our best plan is to remain right here, for he may return before long," said Lieutenant Ames.

The camp was accordingly made there, and the horses were put in the corral at the head of the canyon, where the two animals belonging to the dead outlaw were kept.

Lasso Lil and Bony obtained permission to go out upon a scout, and departed after dinner to see what discovery they could make.

Thus the day passed and at night the two

scouts returned, but without making any discovery.

The next day passed without any adventure, Lieutenant Ames growing more and more anxious regarding the non-return of the chief of scouts to the cabin.

"To-morrow we must make some move," he said, as with Lasso Lil, Bony and the sergeant he was discussing the situation after supper.

For some time they talked together, when all were startled by a hail down the canyon and the challenge of the sentinel on duty.

At once all were ready to resist an attack, for Lieutenant Ames had laid all his plans well for defense; but instead of an enemy Little Rebel Yankton put in an appearance.

He was warmly greeted upon all sides, and walking apart with the lieutenant quickly told his story.

Calling the men to him Lieutenant Ames said:

"Men, we are sharers alike in all dangers, and so I wish to tell you that our brave comrade here, Little Rebel, has been to Fort Wingate in the remarkably short time since his departure, and guided back to the Fatal Camp a troop under Captain Irving, and a light gun, while to Fort Maroni went another troop and light gun under Captain Jamar."

"With Yankton from Maroni came Surgeon Preston, and an escort of a few men to Navaho Springs."

"Finding us gone, a courier was sent to request Captain Irving to come up to Navaho Springs, Surgeon Preston and his men remained there, and Little Rebel here boldly came along on our trail to find us."

A cheer greeted the words of the officer, while Little Rebel modestly said:

"I found you, yes, lieutenant, but it was through the guidance of one I met down on the river-bank, but whom I do not know, though he it was, I believe, who brought you here."

"Our unknown ally," cried Lieutenant Ames, and he told Little Rebel just how they had come there in search of Buffalo Bill.

"And the chief is not yet found?" anxiously asked Little Rebel.

"No, but we hope he will be."

"He must be, lieutenant, for we scouts can find him, dead or alive, and if he has been killed, then with you here, Captain Irving at Navaho Canyon, and Captain Jamar, at Maroni, we can avenge him," and Little Rebel spoke warmly.

"Well, men, we are here in the enemy's country, and are ready to do our share, so to-morrow the work must begin."

"Now turn in, for it is late," and Lieutenant Ames walked off to set the example by retiring.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE UNKNOWN KNOWN.

HAVING decided upon their plan of action, Buffalo Bill and Old Harry set out to accomplish it.

The old plainsman knew the way to the retreat of the outlaws, and so he was to go down to Gurney's cabin and remain until the scout went to Navaho Springs after reinforcements, to make a night march upon the retreat in the cliffs, and then to go and strike a blow at the camp of Flying Fox.

As the two were making their way to the canyon, they suddenly saw, standing ahead of them, a man who was evidently awaiting their approach.

He was six feet in height, splendidly formed, clad in buckskin, and gracefully leaned upon his rifle, while he quietly gazed at them.

His hair and beard were long, and both the scout and Old Harry were impressed with his fine appearance.

"Ho, pard, is it peace or war?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Peace, gentlemen, for I am your friend, not your foe, and willing now to lead you against our common enemy," he said, in a dignified way.

"May I ask who you are, sir?"

"Long ago I bore the name of De Villers, and later, in this country, was known as Captain Champagne, whom my old friend Harry there does not now remember."

Old Harry gave a war-whoop and sprung toward the stranger, wringing his hand hard, and crying:

"Know you with all that hair and beard?"

"I guess not; but I knows yer now, Cap'n Champagne, old pard, and me and Buffalo Bill hev come to this country ter find yer, but all thought yer war dead, except one person, but he wouldn't believe it."

"Permit me to say, Captain De Villers, that Lord St. John Mildmay came to this country to look you up, and he started out, with Old Harry here and others, to find you."

"Those with them were traitors, really outlaws, and led them into a trap, and the result was that they were taken prisoners and Lord Mildmay is now in the outlaws' cave, while our friend here escaped several days ago."

"I came on later, and Lieutenant Ames of the United States Army and a small force are now at Navaho Springs awaiting my return with news, so as to rescue Lord Mildmay."

The stranger listened with deep interest to the scout's explanation, and then said with feeling:

"So my noble friend St. John Mildmay has come to America to look me up?"

"Well, it is just like him."

"I have been lost, Mr. Cody, for I know who you are, for like Mildmay and Old Harry here, I was treacherously dealt with, robbed and thrown into that same cavern-prison among the cliffs."

"It is the storehouse of the outlaws for their booty, and I found enough there to make me a small raft, get arms, ammunition, and stores and blankets and then make my escape."

"I did so by plaiting me a rope of cloth that reached the river, just three hundred feet, not five hundred as the outlaws call it."

"I lowered the small raft I had made and the stores upon it until they touched the water, where it was as calm as a mill-pond, being sheltered there from the current."

"I then lowered myself, and letting go one end pulled the rope after me, thus hiding all evidence that I had escaped, while I left a note to say that I had taken my own life by springing from the cliff into the depths below, being filled with despair at no hope of escape."

"They believed me dead, while I, seeking a retreat, set about my work of revenge, for there were eight men who forfeited their lives to me by their cruel and inhuman conduct toward me."

"I took a solemn vow that I would never leave this land, or have a friendship with a human being, until I had visited just retribution upon those eight men, for there was one, the ninth man and the instigator, Gabe Gurney the chief, who once saved my life, and so I spared him."

"And the others?"

"I killed the seventh last night, and the eighth this morning, as he was going to visit Old Reddy in his cavern home."

"Old Reddy?"

"Yes."

"I cashed in his chips myself, pard," said Old Harry, and he told his story, while Buffalo Bill asked:

"Did you say, sir, that you spared Gurney the chief, the one who masqueraded as the Skeleton Scout, because he did you a service once?"

"I did."

"Well, I have avenged you, for I too have a story to tell," and the scout made known about his first meeting with the Skeleton Scout at Fort Maroni.

"Yes, that was Gurney's plan to keep people out of this country, for I saw him masquerading scores of times, and clever work he made of it, too."

"He did indeed, sir; but he will no more frighten any one with his weird form as he did."

"No, Bill, he do be gettin' his bones ready to play skeleton in earnest," put in old Harry with a grim smile, as he recalled how he had seen Buffalo Bill burying the man who had played the death role so satisfactorily to himself and to the terror of those whose trail he haunted.

CHAPTER LXIX.

"CAPTAIN CHAMPAGNE'S" STORY.

"Do you really understand the motive, Captain De Villers, for Gurney's masquerading as he did in the garb of a skeleton?" asked Buffalo Bill, anxious to learn all he could regarding the man's strange conduct, that he might make a full report of it to General Miles upon his return.

He had the dead man's own story about it, but he wished to know if it was true.

"As I understand it, Mr. Cody, Gurney was a prospector, and a good one."

"It was said that he was a fugitive from justice when he came West, but of that I do not know."

"I met him, as I said, when he saved my life and naturally felt kindly toward him, but a prisoner in the hands of the outlaws I heard much that interested me and let me into the secret ways of Gurney and his men."

"He had recognized, it seems, some United States Secret Service officers and at once took flight, supposing they were after him."

"He came out to this country to hide, and his guide and companion was Old Reddy, whom you killed, old man, in his cavern home, for he would never return to civilization again."

"A good geologist, Gurney spent his time in looking over the country for gold."

"He was successful, for he found both gold and silver, and more, picked up some stones which he felt sure were diamonds of an inferior order."

"The man at once felt that his fortune was made, but became a dog in the manger, for he would not let it be known that the country was rich in minerals."

"Finding that he could do nothing alone, he decided to return to the settlements and organize a band."

"Old Reddy had a claim upon the Indians, so they would be free from all danger from them and could work well together."

"So back to the settlements he went and organizing his band they began work."

"Fearing that others would come to the country, in fact knowing that parties were preparing to do so, they hastened back and lay in ambush to destroy them.

"They were successful in this in several instances, aided as they were by Flying Fox and his band of warriors, and this determined them upon massacring any party that ventured here.

"To further scare people away Gurney decided to play the Skeleton Scout game and thus warn off all who started in this direction, and he played it so well that he frightened his own men terribly, as Old Reddy was the only one in his secret.

"Old Reddy too, I may remark, was the only one who knew of Gurney's secret retreat, for the outlaw chief is a very shrewd man and allowed his own men to know nothing more about him than was absolutely necessary.

"Tracking all of them as I did, however, I knew what each one was about, the chief as well as the members of his band.

"Gurney was also the one to go after provisions never allowing his men to go unless he went with them.

"His men were anxious to increase their force, so Chief Gurney consented to go with four of them and secure four more men.

"These four heard of my desiring to come to this country, and thus it was that they came with me, I joining their party, supposing they were all miners, and accompanied by several good fellows who were my comrades.

"Gurney left us to follow, not knowing that I was along, and his men it was, the four old ones and four new recruits, for the latter were selected by the others as known outlaws, who set upon us and treacherously put my comrades to death one night.

"They spared me, believing I was very rich, and determined to secure a large ransom from me.

"They took me to their retreat, and the tortures they put upon me I shall never forget.

"They tried to force me to send one of their number with a draft for gold, though I told them I was not rich and could not do so, and they nearly killed me because I would not do what was impossible.

"I was hanged a dozen times until the breath nearly left me, I was strung up by my feet, by my thumbs, and had a red hot ramrod run into my flesh, for see I have the scars.

"I was starved, cursed, and every indignity heaped upon me until one day Gurney came to the retreat and recognized me.

"He turned quickly away, not wishing me to recognize him, but from that day I was no longer maltreated, but put into the cavern prison.

"Then it was that I made my escape, as I have told you, and left them all under the belief that I had committed suicide by springing from the cliff.

"Do you wonder that I then sought revenge against those who had killed my comrades, robbed me and so tortured me to the very verge of death?" and the voice of the Englishman trembled as he asked the question.

With the deepest interest Buffalo Bill and Old Harry listened to his story, and sympathized with him in all he had suffered, and in reply to the question put to him, the chief of scouts responded:

"I do not wonder at it, Captain De Villers.

"But there is more to tell us?"

"Yes, there is more to tell you, and I will let you know all now," responded the Englishman thoughtfully.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE FUGITIVE FERRYMAN.

"YES, there is more to tell you," repeated Captain De Villers in the same thoughtful manner.

"I wish to tell you that I came to this country to seek a fortune of my own making, and I was not to be turned aside from my purpose by any danger, hardship or misfortune that I had to meet.

"When I escaped from the cavern prison where the outlaws believed me so safe and escape impossible, I hardly knew which way to turn for safety.

"The booty and provisions the outlaws had stored there enabled me to be well supplied, for I had food for a month or more, my own weapons which were of the best and had been placed there, with blankets and all else I needed.

"I reached the shore at a point where, to my surprise, I saw a boat.

"It was rudely built of hewn logs and timber, and was really a flat-bottomed bateau, capable of carrying a couple of horses, and was propelled by two large oars or sweeps.

"I had overheard the outlaws speak of there being a family dwelling up a canyon near the only crossing of the Colorado, and of whom they knew nothing, and who shunned them, for he would have nothing to do with them.

"This man, they stated, said that he was there as ferryman to put across the river any Mormons who might pass that way, and he was known to be on friendly terms with the Indians, and they told the outlaws plainly that to harm him would be to bring trouble on themselves.

"When the outlaws had sought to find where he lived, they had been firmly told to keep away.

"Seeing this ferryboat I was sure that it belonged to the man I had heard them speaking of, and, as he was not friendly to them I argued that he would doubtless be to me.

"So I sat down on the bank to await there his coming, for I knew that his home was upon the other shore of the river.

"I had waited but a short while when I saw him coming, and rising before him I held up my hands.

"He came forward, his rifle in hand, and I beheld a dark-faced, stout man, with piercing eyes and a face that was both stern and sad.

"He had an intelligent face, and was well dressed in a suit of homespun, top-boots and a slouch hat, while he was armed with a rifle and belt of arms.

"Well, sir, who are you?" he asked in a soldierly way.

"A fugitive from the outlaws who have their retreat in the cliffs.

"I escaped last night from their cavern, which was my prison, leaving them to believe I had sprung from the cliff and taken my own life.

"Are you not the Colorado ferryman of whom I have heard them speak?"

"I am."

"Then you are not their friend?"

"I am not."

"So will befriend me?"

"Come with me across the river and let me know more about you," he said and I thought that his manner was one of suspicion against me.

"I got into his boat with my belongings and he rowed rapidly across to the other shore.

"There he hid the boat very cleverly in an unsuspected break in the rocky shore, and seated in it he began to question me very closely.

"He overlooked my traps, all that I had brought with me, looked at my name on my weapons, and then asked me just who and what I was.

"I told him the truth, and all that I had suffered, and his face cleared of its look of suspicion and he said frankly:

"I am a Mormon, sir, and I am placed here by order of the loved leader of our people, Brigham Young, to serve as ferryman for all Mormons who travel this trail going to Salt Lake City and from it into Arizona and New Mexico, where we have a number of people.

"I am the friend of the Indian, so am not molested, and my home is a mile from here.

"I will take you to it, and there you may find one who is from your country, for my family dwell with me, and you know we Mormons believe in plurality of wives."

"He said no more, bowed at my thanks for his kindness, and carrying my traps himself, led the way to his home.

"It was, as he had said, a mile away, and so securely hidden, that I suspected not its presence near until, passing through a chasm in the rocks we came suddenly upon it.

"To say that I was surprised does not express my feelings, for I saw before me, between two towering cliffs of almost blood red stone, a narrow valley, through which a stream ran into the Colorado River.

"Willows bordered the little stream, and in the valley were planted vegetables, fruit-trees, and there was every evidence of its being a most comfortable little farm.

"Among the shadows of some maples and cottonwoods, scattered here and there, I saw several little log cabins, with a barn, outbuildings, several horses in a pasture, with cows, sheep and hogs.

"I saw too several women about the cabins, and half a dozen or more children, and the sight rendered me dumb with astonishment.

"Here is my home, Captain De Villers," he said, for I had given him my name, "and you are welcome."

"Some call me the Fugitive Ferryman, yet I dwell here in happiness with my wives and children.

"One of my wives is an English woman, and she will be glad to see a countryman.

"Come in and make yourself at home, for here the outlaws cannot find you, and if they did, they cannot have you, so rest content."

"His cabin home was a neat one, and he presented me to his wife who presided over it.

"She was a pleasant-faced woman and greeted me cordially, and that night after supper I met his other two wives, one of them being the English woman of whom he had spoken.

"She was handsome, well educated, and yet when she heard my name started, turned pale and nearly swooned away.

"When she recovered she said quickly:

"Captain De Villers, I know that Heaven has sent you here to let me confess to you a great wrong done you and yours."

"What that wrong was, Mr. Cody, I will tell you and Old Harry if you care to hear the story."

CHAPTER LXXI.

A WOMAN'S WRONG.

THE ferryman, as well as the others who were present, saw that something had gone wrong, Captain De Villers went on to say, when they

beheld the suppressed excitement of the Mormon wife when she heard the name of the Englishman, for he had been introduced under his full name of "Captain Trevor De Villers."

Buffalo Bill and Old Harry had both expressed a desire to hear the whole story which the Englishman had to tell, and so Captain De Villers had gone on with it, speaking in the low-voiced manner natural to him, and his every word held deepest interest for the scout and the old plainsman, bearing as it did upon the very thing that Lord Mildmay had told them.

"That English wife of the ferryman," continued Captain De Villers, "disappeared soon after the introduction, going to her own cabin, for the three wives had separate houses, a short distance apart, and there she dwelt with her child, a young boy of thirteen, and a handsome, bright lad who his father said was a dead shot, a splendid rider and afraid of nothing, going on the trail alone once each month to the nearest settlement of Kanab after the mail, the coming of which was an important item in the several households.

"The supper was a very substantial one, and at the table were all except the English wife, her son being present.

"After the meal the ferryman disappeared for half an hour, and when he returned he called to me and said:

"My wife Alva wishes to speak with you in her own house.

"She has something of importance to say to you.

"It is there where you see that light."

"I at once walked toward the cabin, wondering what it could be that I was to hear, and the woman welcomed me with pale face but composed manner.

"What she said was in substance about what I will tell you, and make known in confidence until I have had an opportunity to investigate for myself.

"She told me that she had recognized my name from having heard her mother often speak it, for her mother was English, and a widow, had come to the United States as a convert to Mormonism.

"She, her mother, had married one high in authority, and possessed of wealth, but for some reason she had never seemed happy, and at last had been allowed by her husband to have a little cottage home alone, where she dwelt only with her only child, afterward the ferryman's wife.

"In their life together the woman told me that she had seen that her mother was unhappy, constantly brooding over some deep sorrow, it seemed, and once or twice she heard her threatening to end her life.

"One night she disappeared mysteriously, and all search for her was of no avail, for she could not be found and it was believed that she had taken her own life.

"But, my informant said, that such was not the case she for a long while had believed, as she had left for her a secret confession, with papers that proved her story, and told her not to make known this fact to others.

"That confession was in effect, that she was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer in England, and living on the sea-shore had gone out in her boat in a storm, and rescued from a yacht wrecked upon the rocks, five persons.

"One of those five was the Earl of De Villers, a young and wealthy nobleman then bound by no ties of marriage, and let me here state that he was my father.

"He fell in love with the pretty farmer's daughter, who had saved his life, as she did with him, and yet his father would not hear of a union beneath him, although the girl was refined and well educated, and he married my mother, Lady Eleanor Enders.

"The result of this union was my elder brother, Duncan, and myself, and this woman informed me that both my father and brother are now dead," sadly said Captain De Villers.

"It is true, sir, for Lord St. John Mildmay so informed Old Harry here and myself," said Buffalo Bill.

"It is a sad blow to me to lose them, though it makes me the heir, of course," said Captain De Villers sadly, and it was full a minute before he resumed his story and went on to say:

"This farmer's daughter married a young sailor, soon after the marriage of my father, but her husband was lost at sea after several years and she became a handsome young widow.

"By a strange circumstance she gave up her home life, went into a hospital as nurse, and when I was born, she was my mother's nurse.

"My father was away from home at the time, a terrible storm was raging and no physician was in attendance upon my mother, who was very ill, and in fact never was well again to her dying day.

"Now the confession of this woman who became a Mormon is that my mother gave birth to twins, that I had a little brother born at the same time, and this nurse, to avenge herself upon both my parents, my father for deserting her, my mother for taking the place she claimed she should have held, secretly took one of the twins, my brother, and sent it away with the assistant nurse whom she bribed to aid her,

"Not a soul suspected the treacherous act, and I was reared as the only child then born, while my twin brother, this evil woman, her confession stated, was brought up in ignorance of who he really was, was given the name of Villers Tremain, and was encouraged to lead a life of shame out of the sheer revenge of this plotter, who intended in later life to complicate matters by having him appear as the son of the Earl of De Villers and bring disgrace upon the family.

"Such was the confession of this Mormon wife, as given to me in her own handwriting, and her legacy to her daughter was that she should carry out her wish of revenge, should aught happen to her, and the name and whereabouts of my alleged twin brother were given that he might be informed in due time who he was, and what he was expected to do when he declared himself the son of the Earl of De Villers.

"The ferryman's wife had turned with abhorrence from carrying out her wicked mother's wishes for revenge, and, acquainted with all the names of our family, she had recognized in me the brother of the one her mother had kidnapped, and so determined to make a full confession to me, and so told me also that my father and elder brother had died since I left England.

"She also gave an address so that I can find my unfortunate twin brother, and I shall at once look him up and he must share with me my fortune, if not the title, and I will redeem him from the evil life he has been brought up to follow.

"Now you know the story, my friends, and it will certainly greatly astonish Lord Mildmay, whose coming here must be connected with the death of my father and brother Duncan."

"And this Mormon ferryman's wife gave you proof of all she told you, Captain De Villers?"

"Yes, Mr. Cody, the confession of her mother and other papers, with the statement that she branded the palm of my twin brother's hand as mine was branded, you see, by my father, and that we were so alike, even to each possessing a gray and a blue eye, that no one could have told us apart."

"There is no doubt, sir, but that she told you the truth, and Lord Mildmay can vouch for it."

"In regard to this ferryman, I had heard of him before, but never suspected that he had his families there with him," said Buffalo Bill.*

CHAPTER LXXII.

BUFFALO BILL HEARS GOOD NEWS.

THE story of Captain De Villers had impressed Buffalo Bill and Old Haphazard Harry, and set them both to thinking.

He had told it in a straightforward manner, and there was a remarkable coincidence in his having discovered the very truth that Lord St. John Mildmay had come to America to find out, in regard to who the man was who was then lying in an English prison under sentence of death.

Neither the scout or Haphazard Harry deemed it best to tell Captain De Villers all that they knew of the affair, but to leave it for Lord St. John Mildmay to communicate to him, when the two, conversant with all the facts, and both sides of the case, could readily clear up all mystery.

So the two kept silent upon the subject, the scout merely remarking:

"When you see Lord Mildmay, sir, he will doubtless have much to tell you."

"Yes, and I to tell him."

"But he is a prisoner, you say, to these outlaws?"

"Yes, sir."

"And confined in the same prison cave from which I escaped?"

"Yes, pard, as I knows, for I escaped from it, too."

"It seems strange to me, knowing Mildmay's pluck, strategy and indomitable will as I do, that he has not escaped also, as both you and I did, old man," said Captain De Villers thoughtfully.

"Lord Mildmay was wounded in the attack made upon him, yes, several times, and was unable to make his escape when Old Harry did, so our friend here told me," said Buffalo Bill.

"That's so, pard."

"He fought like a tiger, but was wounded and only gave up when he couldn't do nothin' else."

"When I escaped it were by accident, for they left the rope ladder hangin' down that night so I c'd see it, and Lord Mildmay he held me up until I c'd catch hold of it and cooney up to ther top and so got away."

"Well, we must now rescue my good friend, for he is one of the noblest of men, and shall suffer no longer in my behalf as he has been doing."

* The Mormon ferryman was later discovered to be the fugitive Danite John D. Lee, of Mountain Meadow Massacre fame.

He ferried across the Colorado the very men the Government had searching for him, but was eventually tracked down and executed. His home still stands there in the canyon, the author having visited it.

—THE AUTHOR.

"Both you and I, old man, know the way to the retreat, and with those whom the scout here has guided into this country, we can readily attack and carry the stronghold of the outlaws."

"Oh yes, sir, it can be done, and must be as soon as we have gotten Lieutenant Ames here to help us, and I am only sorry we will not be strong enough to attack that cruel chief Flying Fox and his village, for they have been the ones, you say, Captain De Villers, to aid the robbing band of whites?"

"Yes, it was Flying Fox who gave them support and protected them."

"But now, my friends, my work is done here as far as retribution and gold-hunting is concerned, for I have managed to find quite a little fortune in the yellow metal."

"But we must now secure Mildmay and make short work of his captors, for we will render good service by doing so."

"With Reddy and Gabe Gurney the chief gone, and my seventh and eighth man just taken from the band, we will not find over nine or ten there in the retreat, and some of those must escape," and then Captain De Villers added with considerable enthusiasm:

"But I have some good news for you both and which I must now make known to you."

"We shall be delighted to hear it, I assure you, sir," said Buffalo Bill.

"It is, that your gallant young lieutenant, Ames, whipped out Flying Fox and forty of his men in Navaho Canyon, captured those they did not kill, and came across the river to look after you, Mr. Cody."

"Lieutenant Ames sent a scout, Little Rebel I believe, to Fort Wingate, and two troops, with two light guns are now camped not very far away from here."

"I know this, as I have a great many hiding-places, and one was in the Navaho Canyon."

"I also knew that you had captured Gurney, and I was at his cabin when you planned with him how he was to betray his men."

"I knew that he did not intend to keep faith with you, and not wishing to take his life, I went after Lieutenant Ames and guided him there."

"But he found you gone, Mr. Cody."

"Now, follow me, and I'll take you by a secret way to the cabin and you will meet your friends," and Captain Trevor De Villers led Buffalo Bill and Old Harry by the secret trail to the cabin in the canyon, where they surprised Lieutenant Ames and all by suddenly appearing before them.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

AMES TO THE RESCUE.

LIEUTENANT AMES felt more anxious than he cared to admit to his men regarding the fate of Buffalo Bill.

The finding of the grave, with Gabe Gurney's body in it, was proof that the scout had escaped death at the hands of the man who had sought to entrap him.

Yet, whither had he gone, and why did they not find him at or near the cabin, was what puzzled the young officer.

If the scout had returned to meet them, to bring them up to the scene, they certainly would have met him, and his mysterious disappearance from the cabin worried him and all the others.

The unknown man who had played such a mysterious and serviceable part in their movements thus far, had guided them to where the scout had been, and then had gone, they knew not where.

Little Rebel had also been guided thither, and was then left by his strange guide, and so the situation stood, and just what to do it was hard for the young officer to determine.

After devoting considerable thought to the matter, he at last decided to dispatch couriers to bring up Captains Irving and Jamar to the scene, when there was suddenly discovered coming down the canyon three persons, who had in some way gotten into the retreat by a trail unknown to those then encamped there.

Lieutenant Ames sprung to his feet as though he had been surprised by an enemy, and just then a cheer broke forth from the lips of every man whose eyes fell upon the tall form of Buffalo Bill.

The lieutenant himself led in the cheer, and stepping quickly forward he grasped the hand of the scout as he said:

"I am glad, indeed, to see you, Cody, for we were all growing most anxious about your fate."

"Thank you, lieutenant, but I am all right, as you see, and so is my old pard, here, Haphazard Harry, of whom you have often heard me speak, and who went as Lord Mildmay's guide."

"Glad ter meet yer, loot'nent; I is fer a fact, for I loves a brave man, an' Buff'r Bill says thar hain't no braver than you be."

Lieutenant Ames blushed like a school-girl at the compliment, and having returned a pleasant response to Old Harry, glanced toward the stranger, who had hung slightly aloof, and to whom Buffalo Bill now turned, while he remarked:

"And now, Lieutenant Ames, I have a pleas-

ant surprise for you, as I desire to present the gentleman whom Lord Mildmay came here to seek, Captain Trevor De Villers."

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise, Cody, and I am delighted to meet you, Captain De Villers, and congratulate you upon having been found by our friend Cody, here," and the two shook hands warmly, the American officer gazing with admiration upon the splendid specimen of manhood that Captain De Villers really was, and looking every inch the bold plainsman in his border garb, long hair and bronzed face.

"Say, rather," said Buffalo Bill, replying to Lieutenant Ames's last remark:

"That I was found by Captain De Villers, for he it is who was your unknown ally at Navaho Springs, your unseen guide to this camp, and the guide of Little Rebel likewise, while he has also been upon my trail as well, doing me good service, and found Old Harry here and myself to-day, and led us here, for he told us where we would find you, while he also made known the fact that you had sent to Wingate for reinforcements, and now had withdrawn two troops and two light guns."

"So you see, sir, he found us."

"So it seems, and as our unseen ally and unseen guide I owe to Captain De Villers the deepest gratitude."

"But tell me what tidings you have of Lord Mildmay?"

"Old Harry can tell you, sir, for he was the last to see him."

Thus appealed to Old Harry told of the attack upon their party by the Indians, under the leadership of white renegades, and how Lord Mildmay had been wounded and the two taken to the outlaws' retreat.

"I got away, loot'nent, my English pard not bein' able ter git with me, so he be still thar; but this gent and me knows ther way ther same as a schoolboy ter dinner when the bell rings, and we kin guide yer outfit thar and rope 'em in, while we rescues him."

"But let me ask yer a favor, loot'nent."

"Well, Old Harry, out with it, for anything I can do for you shall gladly be done," answered Lieutenant Ames.

"It's only ter give me ther keepin' o' ther two fellers that went with me named Mexican Joe and Texas Tip."

"You want them?"

"I want 'em and I want 'em bad, for they war ther imps that set upon us, and hired with me jist ter trap us, and they is now in their retreat, and I wants ter string 'em up."

"Well, old man, they'll get their just deserts never fear; but just as you came up I had decided upon sending couriers to old Fort Maroni where Captain Jamar with his troop and a gun are, and to the Fatal Camp where Captain Irving with a like force are in waiting, to ask them to come here with all speed and make a search for you, Cody, and Lord Mildmay; but as you are safe, and we are going to rescue Lord Mildmay to-night, would it not be just as well to send for them as intended, and uniting forces to attack the village of Flying Fox, whom, with a number of his warriors, I have prisoners here, and to sweep through this part of the country to give a quietus to other red-skins who may be of the opinion that the Government dare not send its soldiers here?"

"I think it would be just what should be done, Lieutenant Ames, though I will be sorry to see, by the coming of Captains Irving and Jamar, that you lose your honors as commander, as they rank you, and you have been the one to win the game so far," said Buffalo Bill.

"Very true, Cody, and I thank you for your thought of me; but personal consideration must always be waived with a true soldier, when general good demands it, as it certainly does in this case, for to retreat, after the rescue of Lord Mildmay, would be wrong, without administering a deserved punishment upon the Indians who allied with the renegade whites for murder and robbery."

"Well said, sir, and just what I expected from an American officer," Captain De Villers said frankly, and turning to him Lieutenant Ames asked him for his opinion of sending for the two commands, the strength of the Indians and what would be the result of such a move.

"It is just what should be done, Lieutenant Ames, and I can guide you to the Indian camps if you wish to attack, and give you their numbers," was the reply of the Englishman.

Half an hour after two scouts were put across the river and started for the two camps of Captains Jamar and Irving, to bring them to the Colorado.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

PREPARING TO STRIKE A DEATH-BLOW.

THE two scouts who went as couriers to bring up the reinforcements, rode with all speed as far as Navaho Springs, for there they could obtain fresh horses to push on the rest of the way to the military camps, and they intended that they should lose no time in doing so and bringing on their respective forces.

A spirit of rivalry sprung up between them as to which one would first return to Navaho Springs, though old Fort Maroni was a trifle

nearer, yet the trail was somewhat harder to travel than that to the Fatal Camp, thus making it about an even race.

Arriving at Navaho Springs the scouts hastily made known to Surgeon Preston that Buffalo Bill had been found, accompanied by Captain De Villers and Old Harry, who had been Lord Mildmay's guide, and that they were going to bring up reinforcements.

They also told him of the intention of Lieutenant Ames to immediately rescue Lord Mildmay, and that he, Surgeon Preston, with his men, was to go at once to the Colorado River where he would find Little Rebel awaiting to guide him to the canyon where the others were to wait for his coming.

The young surgeon lost no time in getting his men ready for the march, and hardly had the two courier scouts gotten half a mile away from Navaho Springs, mounted upon fresh horses, when Doctor Preston rode away on his mission, followed by his men.

He set a rapid pace, for fear he might not be waited for from some reason, and reached the Colorado with horses well worn down by the hard ride.

There they found Little Rebel awaiting them, but as the horses were too warm to swim over, they went into camp for the night, as Lieutenant Ames had ordered, if they arrived after night-fall, though it was yet half an hour before sunset.

"To-morrow night, sir, is the time set for the attack, so there is ample time," explained Little Rebel, as he led the way to the best camping place near.

It was not dawn when the party were astir and at the river-bank, and the horses quickly took the water and swam over, the men being ferried over in the outlaw Gurney's canoe.

Riding into the canyon Lieutenant Ames came forward to greet them, warmly shaking hands with Surgeon Preston, who was a warm friend of his, and presenting Captain De Villers and Old Harry, for Buffalo Bill Doctor Preston knew.

"You are in good time for breakfast, Preston, and then you had better get your case of tools sharpened up, for we expect to give you plenty of work to do to-night," said Lieutenant Ames.

"All right, I am ready, Ames, and glad of the chance, only I hope I'll have outlaws and redskins to practice on instead of our soldiers and scouts, for you know this is my first campaign."

"Yes, I know, but from all accounts you are not slow to learn soldiering in a dangerous country; but get all the rest you can to day, for to-night we spend in the saddle and fighting."

The day passed slowly, until an hour before sunset, when they were ordered to prepare for the march.

There were to be left at the canyon Flying Fox and his braves, under the charge of a soldier and a scout, who were to watch them closely, while another scout remained behind to await the coming of the two troops and be at the river to meet them when they arrived there, which it was thought would be the following afternoon.

During the day Captain De Villers had gone to the home of the Fugitive Ferryman, and asked to hire his boat to ferry over the party, and it had been readily given to him, so that with it, his own boat and the canoe belonging to Gurney the outlaw, the soldiers could be put across the stream quite rapidly.

These boats had been bidden at the point where the scout was to go, when he went across to meet the troopers, he remaining in the canyon as an extra guard to the Indians until it was time for him to depart.

Those three men counted out, and the two couriers, lessened the force of Lieutenant Ames by five, though he had gained in addition Captain De Villers and Old Harry, so that he could still run over a score in number, and when the men were taken into consideration the young officer frankly said that they were worth a hundred ordinary fighters, and would be more than enough for the services expected of them.

When all was in readiness for the march, the little command rode out of the canyon just half an hour before sunset, on the trail to the cliff retreat of the outlaws.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE GOLD-HUNTERS HUNTED.

BUFFALO BILL rode by the side of Old Harry, in the march to the retreat of the outlaws, for the old plainsman knew just how to go there, and had compared notes with Captain De Villers.

Behind the two scouts came Lieutenant Ames, with Captain De Villers by his side, and Surgeon Preston followed in their rear.

Several scouts came next and then the soldiers, with other scouts bringing up the rear.

No pack-horses had been taken along, but each man carried a couple of days' rations with his own outfit.

It was a score of miles or more, to the cliffs where the outlaws had their retreat, and the trail was a rough one, so would have to be traveled at a slow pace in the darkness, for night fell when but a few miles had been gone over.

The retreat, Captain De Villers explained, was

reached by following the course of a rivulet for half a mile, then branching off through a chasm in the rocks, where a fairly well-defined trail led up the mountain-side to the summit.

It was the only ascent to that particular mountain spur, which, sloping on one side, though steep on the other, seemed as one of the towering banks of the Colorado River.

At the point where the retreat was located the cliff was some four hundred feet in height, and went sheer downward, with a few breaks, or ledges now and then, to the Colorado River beneath, and which at that point gave a bend and formed a pool of great depth.

In the face of this cliff, some forty or fifty feet below the edge, the outlaws discovered that there was a cavern, from seeing an eagle fly into it one day with some prey in his talons.

Lowered over by a rope one of the outlaws landed upon a ledge and soon returned to report a very large cave, dry and comfortable, and divided into several smaller caverns.

A general search was then made and the outlaws decided upon the cavern as the storehouse for booty, and also a prison for the captives.

Upon the spur, which was heavily wooded, they had built several cabins and there they had lived for years, their chief spending his time mostly away, gleaning news in the settlements of parties invading the country in search of gold, or at his cabin which was hidden away even from his men.

With a rope ladder to go down to the cavern, the outlaws had found it the very best spot for a hiding-place and prison.

The approach to the retreat was guarded by a man stationed a quarter of a mile away, on the winding trail around the cliff, and he could give an alarm of danger, when he saw any one approaching, by hastening back to where his horse was kept and riding rapidly up the trail, where the men could rally at a given point, a rocky bend, and a dozen could keep back several hundred.

But the sentinels, Captain De Villers reported, were very lax, and no one expected an attack there, feeling themselves perfectly secure.

As the party drew near the retreat, and came to the little stream into which they had to turn, Lieutenant Ames called a halt, and with his men gathered about him told them that Captain De Villers would explain the exact situation of the outlaw camp, so that there would be no mistake, and further that as they neared the spot where the sentinel would probably be, the English officer would go ahead alone, he having requested to do so, with Buffalo Bill following him closely, and Old Harry remaining to bring up the command when the trail to the retreat was cleared of the man on guard.

When all were ready for the move, Captain De Villers and Buffalo Bill rode on ahead, Old Harry remaining to guide the command.

Up the stream went the two in advance, the English officer guiding, into the chasm and then up the steep trail.

"Yonder is where the guide is on duty, if he is there, so I will ride on ahead, you following slowly, after I have gone a short distance."

"I remember that their chief had a way of often singing an old song, when on the trail, one that is a favorite of mine, so I may lull suspicions by doing the same and get right upon that fellow before he suspects anything wrong," and so saying Captain De Villers rode on ahead.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE ATTACK.

In a low, yet pleasant voice the air of Annie Laurie was sung by the Englishman as he rode on up the trail toward the guard post.

There was a sentinel there, but he was asleep, though with the sense of duty upon his mind he slept lightly and sprang quickly to his feet as the voice of the captain reached his ears.

He took his position, rifle in hand, and anxious to show how watchful he was even at the dead of night.

"That is you, is it, captain?" he called out, as the horseman drew nearer.

"Yes," was the response, and the horseman rode on.

The moment he rode alongside of the guard he suddenly grasped him by the throat with a grip that prevented an outcry, and thrusting the muzzle of a revolver hard into his face said sternly:

"Surrender, or you are a dead man!"

The guard quickly raised his hands above his head, and in an instant Captain De Villers had disarmed him.

Then he released his hold upon the man's throat, for he had choked him severely, and at that moment Buffalo Bill rode up, and in a minute the outlaw was securely bound and gagged.

Waiting for the others to come up the party rode forward slowly, Captain De Villers and Buffalo Bill still leading.

As they reached the top of the spur they halted and dismounted.

Lights were seen in one of the cabins, the one used as a kitchen and dining-hall, and voices were heard.

"They is at the'r favorite game o' gamblin'," remarked Old Harry.

"That means, then, that we will catch them awake."

"But come on and let us fight it out," said Lieutenant Ames, and the men were formed to march forward in three parties, the lieutenant leading one, Captain De Villers a second, and Buffalo Bill the third.

The lieutenant's party moved around to the front, opposite the open door, the scout and Captain De Villers placing their men to one side, while Surgeon Preston, with Old Harry, a soldier and a scout guarded the trail leading down the mountain to prevent the flight of the outlaws.

There were a dozen outlaws in the cabin, all seated around the rude table engaged in gambling.

Gold, silver and uncoined metal lay upon the table and betting ran high, when suddenly, in a lull of the conversation, a stern voice without commanded:

"Outlaws, surrender all, or take the consequences!"

A wild yell of surprise and fury, combined with fright, answered Lieutenant Ames's demand to surrender, and the outlaws sprang to their feet, seizing their rifles and drawing revolvers, while the one who acted as second in command ordered silence, and called out:

"Who makes this demand?"

"The Government of the United States, so at your peril refuse," replied Lieutenant Ames.

"Come, men, break out of this."

"Now, all together!" came from the outlaw leader, and with wild yells a volley was fired out of the door and the band went out with a rush.

The volley was fatal to a soldier and a scout, and several of the lieutenant's party were wounded; but the answering fire brought down three or four outlaws, and then came the order:

"Close in upon them!"

The order of Lieutenant Ames was obeyed with a cheer, unmindful of the outlaw leader's cry:

"Show no quarter, pards!"

"They are but a dozen, so wipe them out!"

Then fast and furious rattled revolvers and rifles for several minutes, and the outlaws were cut up badly, and retreated into the cabin, bolting the door after them.

"Burn them out!" came the cry from some one, though it was not an order from the lieutenant, the scout or Captain De Villers.

Still it had the desired effect, for instantly arose cries within the cabin:

"We surrender! we surrender!"

The lieutenant at once commanded:

"Come out, then, one at a time, and trickery will be followed by your death!"

Then the door opened and the leader stepped out, bleeding from a couple of slight wounds.

He was at once seized by Buffalo Bill, and secured, and one by one the others came forth until five prisoners were secured.

"There are more in there," sternly said Buffalo Bill.

"Two more, yes, but they are dead, for they were dying when they retreated into the cabin," was the answer.

The scout at once stepped into the cabin, and a flash and report followed almost in his face.

But he was unhurt, and his revolver replying to the shot, ended the life of the man who had attempted his own.

Of the five prisoners taken all but two were wounded, and seven dead bodies were strewn about.

But the attacking force had lost a couple of soldiers killed, two scouts also, and half a dozen men wounded, so that the victory was dearly won.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

LOST AND FOUND.

JUST as Surgeon Preston had been told, he was given plenty of work to do, and a large fire was built for light, and the wounded, outlaws as well, were brought to him for his aid in their sufferings.

The moment that the fight was ended Captain De Villers had gone to the cliff, followed by Buffalo Bill and Old Harry, and there they found the rude windlass for the raising and lowering of the rope ladder and stones to the ledge of the cavern fifty feet below.

Captain De Villers was the first to descend, and as he creaked the ledge he beheld the tall form of Lord Mildmay standing there, and heard the words:

"Have you been attacked, or has it been a case of Kilkenny cats, destroying each other?"

"It has been an attack, St. John, old fellow, and means your rescue," said Captain De Villers, facing him.

Lord Mildmay started, pressed more closely at the man before him and cried:

"That voice has a familiar ring, but it cannot be that you are—"

"I am Trevor De Villers, your old comrade."

The hands of the two men grasped immediately in warmest greeting and Lord Mildmay cried excitedly:

"You were lost, De Villers, but now I am the one that is found."

"I don't exactly get the situation through my brain—ah! there is Buffalo Bill; what? and you too old man Harry?"

"Yes, Mildmay, we are all here, and in a word, I went through just what you have, for I was treacherously dealt with too; but I escaped and remained here to hunt gold and men and I have been successful in both, so am ready to leave now."

"These two good friends came out to hunt for me, with you, and I found them, for we have wiped out the outlaws and their retreat is in the possession of as gallant a young officer as one would care to know."

"If you are able to climb that rope ladder I will present you to him, for he was sent as an honorary escort to you into these wilds; but say, you were wounded, so are you able to go up the rope ladder?"

"My wounds are all right, and just now I am able to climb a greased pole, so lead the way upward, De Villers."

Up the ladder Captain De Villers went, Lord Mildmay following, and then came Buffalo Bill and Old Harry.

They were met at the top by Lieutenant Ames to whom Captain De Villers at once presented Lord Mildmay and was most cordially greeted by the young officer.

One of the scouts was preparing supper and the party at once went there, for their long night ride and their fight had sharpened their appetites.

After the meal Lord Mildmay and Captain De Villers walked out on the point of the cliff, and standing there, gazing down upon the river and at the grand scenery about them, the former said:

"De Villers, you already know that I came to the United States to find you."

"Yes, the scout, Buffalo Bill, told me so."

"Well, I am sorry to hear to you sad tidings, for I believe that you are unaware of the death of both your father and brother Duncan?"

"I only learned the sad tidings from Buffalo Bill."

"This leaves you of course the heir."

"In fact, yes, but I have another brother, Mildmay."

"Ah! another brother?"

"Yes."

"I had not heard of this."

"Nor I, until lately, but it is a fact I have a twin brother."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is, and I told Buffalo Bill of the circumstance, which lately came to my knowledge, but I suppose he left it for me to make known to you."

"He told me nothing of it."

"Then I will do so," and Captain De Villers made known the story told him by the wife of the Mormon ferryman.

Lord Mildmay listened in deepest surprise to all, and then said:

"And I have a strange story to tell you, De Villers, one that will fill you with deepest amazement and pain you as well."

"I am ready to hear it now, Mildmay."

"Do you know aught of this twin brother of whom you speak?"

"Nothing."

"Were you strikingly alike?"

"My informant says so and we were marked to prevent one being recognized for the other, for he was taken in revenge, by a woman who had saved my father's life and had hoped that he would marry her."

"What mark had he that resembled any you have?"

"Well, we both had one gray and one blue eye, for you know that has been a remarkable feature of mine."

"Yes."

"And he had also pricked into the palm of his hand with India ink the coat of arms of our family."

"Do you know his address?"

"I have an address by which I am told he can be found; but, poor fellow, it was a part of this woman's revenge to bring him up to an evil life, and I fear he is a sad case."

"De Villers, I know where your twin brother can be found, for I have seen and talked with him, and he goes by the name of Villers Tremain, which is one of your family names."

"He is a sailor, has led a roving, wild life, but I do not believe he knows who he really is."

"On the last ship on which he served he led a mutiny, took the life of an officer, and is under sentence of death in London."

"In your absence and nothing being known of you, many believed that he was none other than yourself, striving to hide from shame by denying your personality."

"But I felt differently and so I came to the United States to find you, and thank Heaven I have done so."

"I can heartily say amen to that, Mildmay; but what about that poor fellow, my brother, as I know he must be?"

"I secured a stay of execution for him, and when we return and the story of his life is known I believe the death sentence can be changed to a term of imprisonment."

"I sincerely hope that it may, and we must lose no time in returning to England."

"I will be glad to start at once, De Villers."

"No, no, not so hastily as that, for we owe much to our noble American friends who have made your success in finding me sure, and I have promised to guide the command, which we join to-morrow, to the village of that cruel chief, Flying Fox."

"I will gladly accompany you."

"But are you able to do so?"

"Oh, yes, for finding you has made me a well man; but now let us get a few hours of rest before dawn."

"In one moment, for I just wish to ask you a question."

"As many as you please."

"My brother wedded Lady May Melville of Moorlands."

"He did not, for his death occurred before the marriage was consummated, and it was said that she had come out boldly and refused to be his wife."

"And she is not married?"

"She is not."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, and she urged me to come to America and find you."

"God bless her, I can sleep now!" and the two walked back to the camp in silence.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

A LESSON THAT WAS REMEMBERED.

THE camp slept late the morning after the capture of the retreat of the outlaws, only the young surgeon and his volunteer assistant being up with the sun to give the wounded a call.

When Lieutenant Ames awoke he first gave orders for the dead to be placed together for burial, the outlaws apart from the others, and then as Captain De Villers told him the march to the village of Flying Fox could be made from there, he sent a scout to the ferry to bring the troops there, and to also fetch along with them the Indian prisoners left in the canyon, thus making the outlaws' retreat the base of operations.

The day was passed in resting, and early in the afternoon there was a report that the troopers had arrived.

It was ahead of the time by which they were expected, but the two captains had ordered their men into the saddle half an hour after the arrival of the two scouts, so had reached Navaho Springs together, and lost no time in being ferried across the river, and swimming their horses over after their arrival.

As fast as they landed they mounted, and the lieutenant's scout being there with the Indian prisoners and their guards, the march was taken up for the outlaws' retreat.

"We can rest men and horses when we get there, Irving," said Captain Jamar, who was the ranking officer.

"Yes, Ames has covered himself with glory and it will not do for us to prevent his carrying out his plans."

"You are right, Irving, and I'll tell you that I shall not assume command, but allow Ames to carry out his own plans, as he deserves to do, for the credit is all his and Buffalo Bill's."

"Just what I expected of you, Jamar, so we will report to our junior in rank Lieutenant Robert F. Ames for orders," responded Captain Irving with a smile, and he added:

"It is a military courtesy which he will appreciate and may teach some of our grasping-for-all-credit seniors a lesson."

The two generous captains arrived together at the outlaws' retreat and were greeted by Lieutenant Ames most cordially, while he said:

"Now, Captain Jamar, I yield my command to you, asking for the position of aides on your staff for myself and for Captain Trevor De Villers, late of the British Army, and Lord Mildmay, now Colonel of the English Lancers."

Captain Jamar received the two Englishmen warmly, presented his officers to them, and then replying to Lieutenant Ames said:

"Pardon me, Ames, but you have done the work so well Irving and myself have decided that you retain command, we waiving our rank in your favor."

"Bravo!" cried Lord Mildmay and Captain De Villers in a breath, struck by the generosity of the American officers.

But Lieutenant Ames returned with feeling:

"I more than thank you, Captain Jamar, and you also, Irving, for your generous offer; but I was sent out as an honorary escort to Lord Mildmay, and you were both sent out to extricate me out of a bad scrape."

"I have accomplished my part of the work, and you, Captain Jamar, are to take command now, for I will bear to nothing else, and win the fight against the Indians."

Thus urged Captain Jamar yielded, and the party of officers all sat down to dinner together, for the two guns with their lieutenants and the rest of the troopers had all come up a couple of hours after the arrival of the captains.

That night a council of war was held, and it was decided to make the retreat the base of operations, leaving the wounded and prisoners there, and march at daylight in fighting trim for the village of Flying Fox.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

To describe the march and attack upon the Indian village, would be but to rewrite pages of frontier history in which our gallant army has taken so conspicuous a part, so I need only state that the Indians were surprised and most severely punished, while the second camp that owed allegiance to the cunning chief Flying Fox, and half a day's ride distant from the main one, was also visited and suffered severely.

Back to the retreat went the victorious troopers, carrying their wounded with them, for brave men had fallen in the fight, some to rise no more, others wounded more or less seriously.

Aiming at the retreat again a halt was made of several days for rest, and the chief Flying Fox and his braves were set free, after being told how his people were punished, and admonished never again to become the tools of white renegades.

They left the retreat in haste, but sullen, and went on foot back to their ruined villages.

Old Harry particularly hated to see them go, especially as he had failed to find in the outlaw camp his two traitors, Texas Tip and Mexican Joe.

Arriving at Wingate the victors were grandly received, and the Englishmen given a most hearty welcome, while "Lute" Ames, as his intimate friends call him, became the hero of the hour.

Anxious to get back to England with all dispatch, Lord Mildmay and Captain De Villers remained but a few days at Wingate as Colonel Baldwin's guests, and then, with Lieutenant Ames and a detachment as an escort, and Buffalo Bill and half a dozen scouts, they started for the nearest place where the stage running eastward could be taken, Old Harry having been remembered most generously for his services, and remaining at the fort to have a "burrah time" with the sutler as he expressed it.

But, "there's many a slip." The guests and their escort were neither beyond the danger line, nor out of the "vexed Bermoothes" of that wild, weird, wonderful wilderness.

They struck the trail of one of the most strange episodes of their lives—full of adventure as their lives had been, in many lands.

What that trail led to and brought forth is not for this present chronicle to relate; the story here told is rounded out to a full conclusion; else Old Harry would not have had his jubilee at the fort.

And yet, the gallant Mildmay and De Villers had not concluded their sojourn, as we may, in the near future relate. Suffice now to state that it was several months before they reached England.

But, once more "home again, from a foreign shore," their stories of the noted scout, guide and wilderness walker made the name of Buffalo Bill a household word and served to pave the way for the honors he received in after years when he pictured Wild West life in foreign lands.

THE END.

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